



Ruth Hawthorne.

The Baptism.
Frontispiece.

See Page 9.

RUTH HAWTHORNE;

OR,

LED TO THE ROCK

By E. N. B.,

AUTHOR OF 'HAPPY LIGHT' AND "MARGARET CHESTER."



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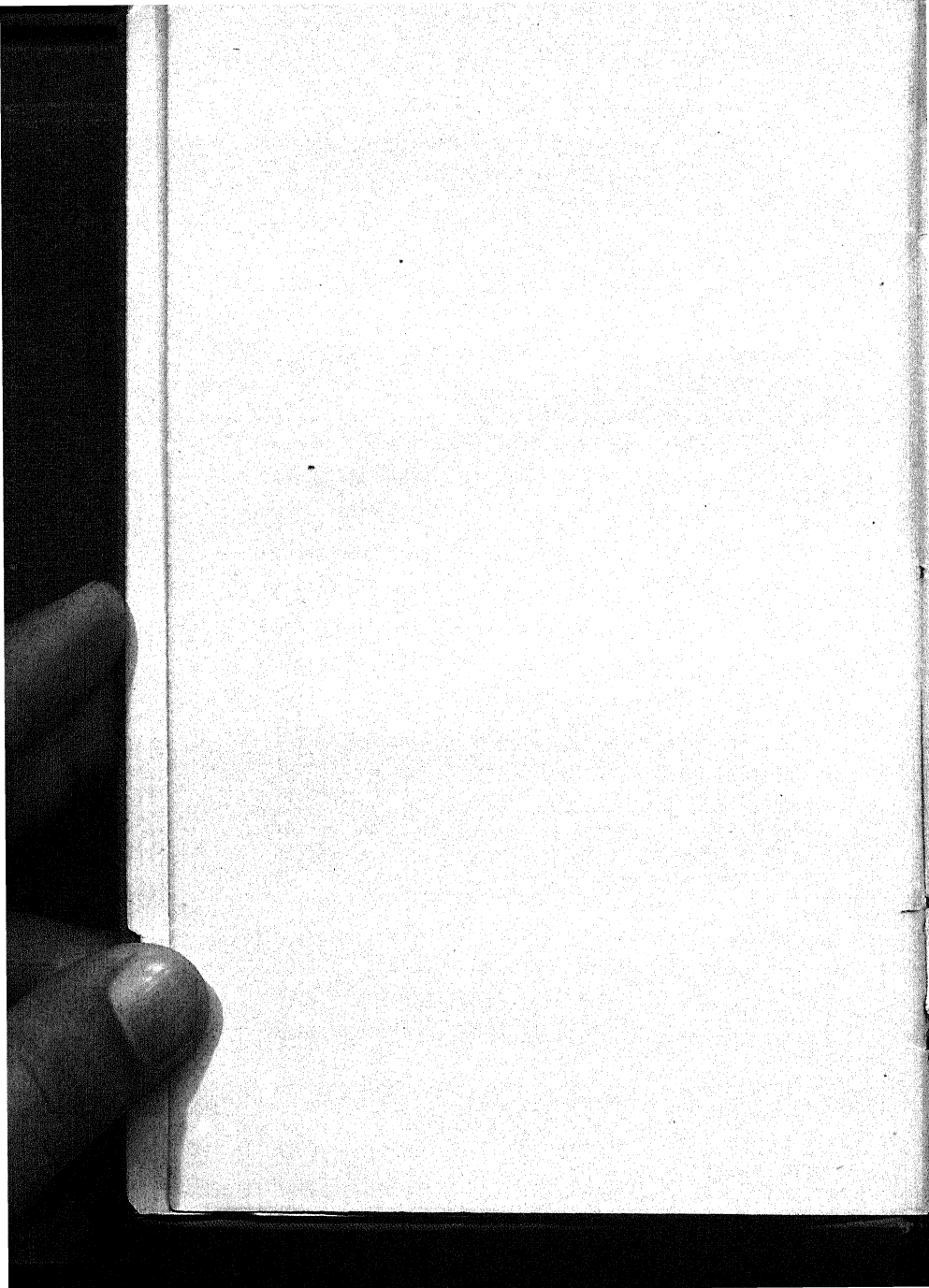
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PREFACE.

IN RUTH HAWTHORNE we have an illustration of the perverseness with which one trained in the faith of the Bible may turn away from the religion of her parents, and choose falsehood rather than truth, vague unbelief rather than the firm foundation of God's revelation of himself. In it is also shown how entirely unsatisfying is the rest that skepticism, misnamed philosophy, can give; how imperatively, in the hour of grief, the soul demands something higher than itself, something above mere human hope, and how firm is the Rock to which at last the wanderer's feet are led.





RUTH HAWTHORNE.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE NIGHT.

REVELATION and Nature met to bring down from God a perfect Sabbath. The June sun had reached its mid-day height and filled the sky and covered the earth with that warm, soft radiance which most nearly typifies our Father's love. All things seemed to rest. The winds were still, and tree and grass and flower stood motionless, drinking in the blessed light. Birds twittered and sang, and happy children prattled softly to each other on their way to Sunday-school. No rude noises were there to disturb the stillness. The day was holy.

The silver communion-service upon the table in Mr. Hawthorne's church showed that there

was about to be celebrated the event most memorable in the annals of time—the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before this service three children, too young to know the grief of sinning, were brought to the altar to receive the ordinance of baptism. Two were presented by their parents; the third was brought by an elderly woman, its nurse; it was the minister's own child. Suddenly, in obedience to a call from on high, its mother had disappeared from the company of mortals and gone to receive her palm-branch and crown in the court of the universal Sovereign. If, as is the faith of some, the departed be sent forth to minister, unseen and unheard, to the dear ones yet on earth—or if, as a modern writer has said, "death makes no vacancy in those who sit down to the Christian communion, but at its banquet-table the perfected spirits of just men, with an innumerable company of angels, sit down beside those who have not yet surrendered their bodies to the grave"—then, surely, the mother was there. Then the words, "Channing, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," must to her who knew life and death and heaven have been fuller of import than to dwellers on the

earth. The babe looked up into its father's face and smiled, but tears had mingled with the baptismal water, for the parent pitied his motherless child, and felt how hard it would be to keep him in the way of the Lord blameless without her tender care. It was not a scene to witness unmoved; many a tear was dropped and many a prayer sent up by the people for the bereaved family.

There was one who looked on with an interest amounting to anxiety, but who neither wept nor prayed. At first she feared that the little one would cry, and when the nurse took him away and he had uttered no sound, though both his little hands were stretched back toward his father, a sense of relief, soon giving way to scorn, was exhibited in her face. It was Ruth Hawthorne, the pastor's oldest daughter. She sat a little way back in the congregation, not in deep mourning, but dressed in well-chosen, subdued colors becoming her place and circumstances. Her face was kind and intelligent, exquisitely moulded and tinted by nature, and charming even now in the midst of its scorn.

Nestling close beside her was a little girl not yet four years old, gay and restless as a humming-

bird, whose bright, sweet face glowed with interest as she watched the ceremony, and who, when it was over, pulling her sister's fair head down to hers, whispered softly :

"Did you see Channy? Dat was our baby, wasn't it?"

Then Mark, their brother, only twelve years old, stood up from the front seat alone, and listening to the Confession of Faith read by his father, made audible responses, and took upon himself the solemn covenant of one publicly confessing Christ with an earnestness and solemnity which gave promise that its vows would be kept.

These seemed indeed a family of whom a father might be proud, and surely it would have been pardoned Mr. Hawthorne if his thoughts, arrested by the sight of his children, had dropped for an instant the sacred themes upon which his lips were dwelling and lingered upon those dear ones with parental fondness. He could not be unmindful of them that day, but they were remembered chiefly as motherless, and in lifting his voice to God for the children of his congregation it was for them he prayed. One was in the fold, but of Ruth, for whom prayer had been made longest, he was painfully anxious. In speaking

of the sufferings of Him whose death they were celebrating, of the love which prompted him to endure so much that our fallen race might again be raised, it was for her more than any other that his thoughts shaped themselves, in the hope that some words fitly uttered might lead her to the cross. Many a heart was touched and many a hidden face wet with tears. There were times too when the girl trembled, but the feeling passed quickly away. Having no room in her heart for Christ, she found little difficulty in resisting arguments and appeals.

Ruth was a favorite with the congregation. As their pastor's daughter, they felt something of the pride of ownership in her whose intelligence and rare good sense commanded so much respect, whose grace, beauty and kindness won their love, and who seemed likely to endure all the admiration they might bestow without being spoiled.

After the benediction she passed down the aisle, leading Lilian, extending her hand to one and another who pressed up to speak, and bowing sweetly to many others beyond her reach. Her gladdest smile was reserved for two friends awaiting her at the outer door of the church.

Mark took Lilian's hand in obedience to her glance and walked on with a brave, firm step, like a man, while the little sister fluttered along by his side, half walking, half dancing, and prattled in words to which his preoccupied thoughts gave no heed. Ruth followed with her friends, Frank and Mabel Hope. Suddenly a boy rushed by and seized Lilian's other hand, which rudeness seemed by no means to displease her, for she looked around to her sister and laughed gayly, while the brother scarcely noticed the intruder.

"Noel Brainard is a strange child," said Ruth.

"Very strange," Mabel replied. "Not much like Mark. Weren't you proud of him when he stood up before so many people, looking so brave and handsome?"

"If you think he looked brave and handsome, I am glad, but I was pitying the poor boy then. I am sorry he is so rash, so foolish. He did not know what he was saying. It's not in nature for any one to keep such promises, much less for a little fellow with his impulsive temperament. By and by he will give it all up, and then he will feel ashamed."

"He need not. He will do about as well as the rest of the church," said Mabel.

"It may be that Mark is nearer right than we are," said Frank.

Ruth looked up and saw again in his face that seriousness which she had remarked when he waited at the door.

"Is Saul also among the prophets?" she said, archly.

The young man neither looked at her nor smiled.

"Girls," he continued, "I am afraid we are wrong. What Mr. Hawthorne has told us to-day is divine. I am afraid that our philosophy is but human."

"There spoke feeling," said Mabel.

"Possibly," Frank replied.

"I see little examination on the other side," said Ruth, "while we have been continually examining. We have taken up the question of religious truth, point by point, discussed it fairly, and rejected only what in the very nature of things cannot be right. Our conclusions have been deliberate."

"Very true; but does it follow, therefore, that they cannot be partial and wrong?"

"Certainly it does so far as we are concerned. We do our best. It is the highest effort of our

minds, and nothing above that can be required of us."

"Ruth, what is it the Bible says about 'hewing out for one's self cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water'? I felt while hearing your father talk that it might be we had been constructing one of these. My soul is just as thirsty as ever."

"Frank—"

"Please hear me through. What if God—knowing our narrowness, and that we should be quite as likely to start with wrong as with right premises, that no two would come to the same conclusion, and therefore there would be nothing to rest upon—had compassionately revealed of himself all we are capable of comprehending, and had written out plainly our duties and our destiny, would it not be just as well to accept it, just as rational, as to go to building up systems of philosophy and theology of our own?"

"You assume too much and would make me admit too much. But we are in the street and shall be overheard. We must defer this discussion. I must be content with referring you to our old definition of reason: 'A faculty of the mind by which it distinguishes truth from false-

hood,' and so-forth. So much by way of suggestion."

"Frank is having a fit of the blues, I think," said his sister Mabel; "but really, I don't see how he can be in low spirits on such a day as this."

"I do feel somewhat depressed, sister, and the day favors it. This clear light, it seems to me, is entering my eyes as it never did before. God hovers over me infinitely great and pure in this sunshine, and looks down into my soul, seeing, what until now has been hidden from myself, how little and how vile I am."

"Take care of him, Mabel," said Ruth, turning in at the gate of her own home; "he needs it."

"I promise that he shall be looked after," was the gay response.

"Who would have thought that Frank Hope would turn in this way?" Ruth said to herself, going up to her room, where she threw off her things impatiently. "I shall be ready for him to-morrow evening."

Then she sat down and thought: "Who was Christ that she should obey him? Why did he come to her demanding the best years of her life in a service which she hated, which she believed to be unnatural and uncongenial to every human

soul? A wise and good Creator would not require the being he had formed to do violence to itself. Why should devotion to him be thrust upon her? Why should it be upon little Channing while yet he knew nothing but bodily comforts and discomforts? When he should reach the age of discernment and choice would be the time to say whom he would serve, and he should decide, not his father, else it were bondage. Upon herself the same sign had been placed when she was even younger. What did it avail? Now she rebelled against it.

"And I have been persecuted," she said, "ever since. Were it done in a different spirit it would be unbearable, but my father, being happy in his fanaticism, tries to thrust it upon me, thinking I should enjoy it too. But though love has done it all on his part and hers, my dear, dear mother's, it is none the less persecution.

"What have I done that I need to repent of? I have tried to be a faithful daughter and sister, a kind friend to everybody, even to some who were repulsive to me. I have not wasted time, I have fallen into no bad practices. No one can bring anything against me. Yet, because I will not be hypocritical enough to confess myself a great sin-

ner when I do not believe I am, or try to super-induce upon myself some fanatical delusion, because I am frank and honest and see things as they really are, I am wicked, vile, condemned to be banished from the society of the pure, while a miserable, guilty vagabond who confesses faith in Christ is at once introduced to the highest happiness. I will not be a hypocrite!

"It is a hard lot that God has assigned to me, so young, so young. How can I—how *could* I—bless him for taking away my mother, whom we all need so much? I must take up the burdens of life with these children to care for. They will look to me as they would have looked to her, if another does not come to be called by that dear name. But that shall not be. So long as I am Ruth Hawthorne I will supply her place to my father and them as far as possible, but I will not own another mother. Yes, I can do more. I can thrust back any hopes that may come to me, for their sake. And in sacrificing myself it will be seen that I am not so very wicked as they call me. Pshaw! I wish people would be sensible."

"Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of

heaven," said the only One in whose teachings there was never a shade of error.

Ruth's parents had done all in their power to lead her to the Saviour. Was it possible that they had done too much, and placed an obstacle in her way? Perhaps the desire to add another example to falsify the adage declaring ministers' children to be the worst had infused something of passion and pride with the earnestness of their teachings which her keen eyes could see, and being willful, she had gone her own way. Their prayers were not answered. God knew why.





CHAPTER II.

A PROHIBITION.

RUTH arose from her soliloquy, dressed herself for her duties, and taking a satisfied look in the glass, went down stairs. After giving orders for dinner and telling "Aunt," the nurse, to go and rest, she took up the baby and amused herself with him—he was just one year old—until the dinner was brought on, when fortunately he went to sleep. A subdued cheerfulness prevailed at the table, but Ruth and Lily did most of the talking.

When the meal was over, Mark went to his room, Mr. Hawthorne and Ruth took their reading, while Lilian, flitting from one place to another, ran into the yard for flowers, told bits of stories to her bird, touched upon almost everything and lingered upon none. At length the silence of the room made known her absence and disturbed her father.

"Where is Lily?" he asked.

"I don't know. I will find her."

So saying, Ruth began a search, and on going to the kitchen found the child solemnly putting water from a basin upon her doll's head, while Ann stood by laughing.

"Poor thing!" she said, mentally. "It is hard to be a little girl with no mother on the Sabbath;" and she laid aside her reading to walk with Lilian under the trees and tell her wonderful things of the flowers, insects and birds that were all about them.

"I know God made 'em; nobody else could," said the child, after listening long and asking many questions. "Why don't you talk 'bout him like papa and aunty do?"

"Because I am not like them."

"I know what tells about him—the Bible does. Oh, Woodie, let's git the gweat big new one, so you can show me the pictures and tell the stowies!"

So they went in, and while the little one climbed upon the sofa, the elder sister brought the choice book, and seating herself by her side, patiently turned over the leaves and explained the engravings. Many a little story she had to tell

of those ancient worthies, and some doctrines to state in answer to Lily's questions. The father, who listened eagerly for her words, wondered how she could see so plainly and yet reject.

"Shall we have some music, Ruth?" he asked, when he saw that they were growing tired.

"As you please," was the pleasant reply; and promptly seating herself at the piano, her father selecting the hymns and music, Ruth played and they sang together. Then came that wonderful hymn:

"When I survey the wondrous cross,"

which was a favorite with Mr. Hawthorne. After singing it through, he repeated the last two lines:

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!"

"You do not feel it so, my dear," he said.

Ruth made no answer at first, but after a little replied:

"No, father, I cannot. And if you love me, do not say a word to me personally on that subject again. We cannot all see alike. It is impossible for me to think as you do. I shall hear your sermons, so please let it drop between us when alone, until I ask you to speak."

The father turned away and presently left the room. Ruth did not see his face.

When it was time for evening service, Mr. Hawthorne came back, and calling to Mark, was about to go to the church, when Ruth sprang up with surprise.

"Am I not to go, or do you prefer to have me stay with the children?"

"It is not necessary that you should remain, since Mrs. Jennison will be here. I thought you would not care to go with us."

"That is strange, for I *always* do," she said, hurrying on her things.

Though the pastor entered the room that night bearing a burden which seemed too heavy for him, there was unusual animation in the prayer-circle. So many were prompt to speak and pray that Mr. Hope and Mr. Millgate, for whom the others usually waited, had scarcely opportunity for a word. Most unexpectedly to all, Frank Hope rose, announcing his desire to become a Christian. His mind was dark, he said, and he asked for instruction and prayers.

"It is all over with Frank," said Mabel, tearfully, as she drew Ruth to her side when the meeting had closed.

It was a pleasant arrangement, entered into long before this, that Frank and Mabel should take Ruth home, for Mr. Hawthorne was usually detained a little, and Mark liked to wait for him. So as they went out the young man gave each an arm, and they walked on without speaking. How could they talk?

After she had bidden her father good-night Ruth heard him walking in his room until it was very late, and knew that he was in mental distress. Easily divining the cause, she was so annoyed as to be unable to sleep. Every footfall gave her pain, and more than once she was on the point of going to him to ask forgiveness.

"But why should I?" she questioned. "I do not repent of what I have done. I should not have spoken the words had I thought they would wound him so, but I meant and felt them. We have to bear some pains. We must needs, even the most loving, be constantly wounding each other. It is so everywhere. And yet they tell me that this world is planned by an all-wise, all-loving Being, in whose service it is my duty to give up everything that I prize. No, I will not go. Even to save my father pain will I not soil my soul with any hypocritical professions."



CHAPTER III.

A DAY AND A DREAM.

RUTH slept late the next morning, and, as the baby was not well and required all Mrs. Jennison's attention, had Lilian to care for, whom she had barely time to dress before the bell rang for breakfast. At the family devotions she read and sang as usual, but, in view of her father's unusual language, felt herself entirely left out of the prayer. Because she had entreated not to be spoken to in regard to her own most vital interests, must he cease to pray for her? That was more than was asked, and at once there rose in her heart a sudden feeling of desolation. Why? Only for a moment she heeded the feeling, and to the question did not care to find an answer; both were vigorously put down, and she went about her work with songs and smiles.

Besides having the supervision of all its internal arrangements, Ruth had every morning to put the house in order—on Monday was a heavier task than on any other day in the week—then to spend an hour in the garden with her father, after which she went to her studies.

Ann was a valuable maid, strong and healthy, who knew how to do all kinds of work, but she thought herself too old to be under the direction of so young a mistress, and could wield tongue as well as hands. She had not been with the Hawthornes long, and Ruth was in constant fear lest they should lose her. This morning she was washing and was cross. Keeping an eye out while Ruth was taking the dishes into the kitchen to see whether she would wash them, Ann entertained her thus:

“Shure and what is a poor soul like me to do? There’s Mrs. Stewart’s girl over the way—the lazy thing!—she’s been kapin’ her sleepin’ an hour later than meself. She’s the slowest sowl about the house intirely, and there’s her washing all out on the line, just because the misthress is willin’ to give a poor girl a lift when she’s hard at work. An’ here I’ve bin on my fate ivery blissed minute from four o’clock, and nobody ilse up in the

house, and here lie the clothes all in the suds because nobody will give a lift. What will me character for work be good for if I stay in a place like this? Not another minute will I stay where it makes no difference whether Ann kills herself at hard work or not. Ann has friends an' she'll go to thim. Good-bye, miss. I'll go this very minute to yer father to settle!"

She wiped her hands, and Ruth was alarmed. What would become of them!

"Don't go, Ann. I will do all I can if you will only stay;" and rolling up her sleeves, Ruth began washing the dishes. She had not been about it long when Mark came in with his hand badly cut and bleeding. He was pale and frightened, and the blood had stained his clothing.

"Aunty, aunty!" she called, but Lily came instead, informing her that aunty was not in the house. She could not wait, but trusting to her own good sense, bound up the wound as best she could. Mark must change his clothing; she had his collar to fasten, to give an extra brush to his hair, preparatory to his going to school, and then it required all her art to persuade Ann to clean the soiled clothes he had taken off.

Again Ruth went to work, but there came the

noise of a fall, succeeded by screams from Lillian. Running to the foot of the stairs, she found her pet lying on the floor with a bleeding face, still with loud cries giving utterance to her misery. Ruth took her in her arms and wiped off the blood that she might better see the little wound.

"We'll all die togedder, won't we?" said the child as soon as she could get breath enough to speak.

"I don't know but we shall," replied the sister, half laughing, half crying, fearing Lillian might have suffered injuries which she could not discover. But Mrs. Jennison came, and pronounced her unhurt save a few slight bruises. As the babe was asleep, the good woman took the little girl into the nursery, and soothing her in her own motherly way, soon made her quite happy.

Thus released, Ruth went again to her work, but at ten o'clock, the hour for recitation, her father found her sweeping and quite unprepared by study. Mabel had come, and after narrating the events of the morning by way of excuse for her deficiencies, Ruth listened while her friend recited that which she also should have learned.

After dinner the clouds passed away from the

household. Channy had had a long sleep and awoke good-natured ; Mark went back to school ; Mr. Hawthorne took Lilian with him in the carriage to call on some distant parishioners ; Ann sang her tuneless songs, as usual when she felt satisfied ; and Ruth, with the promise of a quiet afternoon, threw herself upon the couch in her own room to read and rest.

The book had fallen and she was just dropping to sleep when the door-bell rang, and directly came a summons to the parlor to see a gentleman who had inquired for her father. Then, for the first time that day, she was inclined to give way to impatience. Going down to the parlor she met a tall, fair-faced man, who said, as he arose and cleared his throat, that he supposed her to be Miss Hawthorne ; his name was Mr. McMinn. He had met her father at the last ministers' meeting, had been very much pleased with the acquaintance, and being in town could not make up his mind to pass him by. Here the stranger smacked his lips. Ruth did not think her father would feel honored by such attention, and therefore did not say he would. She only said :

"I am sorry, Mr. McMinn, but he will probably not return before evening."

"Not before tea?" he queried, anxiously.

"I do not know. He frequently stays late when visiting in the country."

Again the stranger smacked his lips and rubbed his hands, though the meaning of these gestures was not plain.

"I have a feeling—ahem—I think he will be home earlier to-day. I think I will wait for him."

Ruth resigned herself to her fate as meekly as possible. She was not inhospitable, but her plans for tea had included only their own family, and having taken her measurement of the man's mental stature, she felt that his presence would be wearisome. There was nothing about him to reveal his profession, if indeed he had any; but as soon as opportunity presented she inquired where he was preaching. He replied that he had no charge at present; he was now canvassing for a very valuable religious work which he knew Mr. Hawthorne would want, and, knowing how great his influence would be, he was anxious to get his name before presenting it elsewhere.

"Have you seen the other clergymen of the place?"

"I have not—no, I have not."

"Then would it not be better to see them? I am afraid you would lose time by waiting for my father. There is Mr. Gurley, whose church is much larger than his, and of course his influence is proportionately greater."

Ruth was half frightened at her own temerity, fearing to have made her hint too obvious even to the obtuse mind of her visitor. But he smiled, said she was too modest, and went on talking in such a way as to assure her that whatever she might say would be well received. After a little he began to think well of her plan, and with much ceremony went away with the promise to return soon.

Scarcely was he gone when Ruth heard Lizzie Lee's voice in the dining-room. Hastening thither, she found her dressed for the street.

"Oh, Lizzie, I am so glad you have come! A stranger, who wants a place to stay, has settled down upon us instead of going to a hotel. You see papa is away, and it has been my question for the last ten minutes what to do with him. He is coming back, and you must help me. Stay with us this afternoon."

"Why, Ruth, I supposed you had had experience enough with strangers to know how to get along

with any one by this time. I couldn't help you at all."

"At least we could keep each other from going down his throat."

"Oh, is he such an ogre?"

"He doesn't look at all terrifying, but he keeps up a kind of labial gymnastics, which give indications of cannibalism. You must stay, Lizzie."

"No, Ruth, I came to take you down town to help me select the shades for my embroidery. Your eye is so much more correct than mine."

"But our stranger—what shall be done with him?"

"Give him the latest papers and let him entertain himself."

"If I knew he wouldn't steal!"

"Do you have to look out for *your* visitors in that direction? I supposed they were all sheep."

"You know there is a class of animals that sometimes appear in the same clothing."

"Get aunty to look after him, and it will all be right."

"So I will. He'll enjoy her company, and maybe learn something."

The arrangements being satisfactorily made, the two girls had a delightful walk, and when

they came back, Ruth brought her work and entertained Mr. McMinn as best she could until it was nearly dark, when her father returned and relieved her by taking him into the study. Before this Lizzie had come again, and a little later Walter Manwell and Angie Mead came according to appointment. Frank and Mabel were late, it was said, and some of the company doubted whether Frank would come at all, in view of the stand he had taken the evening before. Mabel made her appearance late and alone.

"Where is Frank?" all but Ruth eagerly inquired.

"He is not feeling well this evening, though he is not so sick but that he would come for me if he knew I were here."

Mr. Manwell read a short essay; there was some discussion which this wise circle fondly called "philosophical;" much sprightly conversation, and then Ruth entertained her visitors with music. The evening had passed rapidly, and Mabel, looking at her watch, was startled to find it so late.

"I must go immediately," she said, rising. "The good folks at home will think I have wandered away." Angie and Walter insisted that

she must not go alone, and so the little party broke up.

When Lizzie had gone Ruth went to her father in the study. She thought of the night before, and put her arms affectionately around his neck, when he drew her to a seat on his knee and kissed her cheek.

"What have you done with your guest, papa?"

"Shown him to his room."

"Did you know him?"

"I had seen him only once, when we took dinner at the same table. But he seems to have taken a great liking to me." Mr. Hawthorne smiled.

"Is he a clergyman?"

"No; it is only on the strength of that acquaintance and having a religious book to get subscribers for that he thus favors us."

"Papa, how could you make up your mind to be a minister? If you had chosen to keep a hotel, you might have been rich now."

"My customers might have been fewer then," he said, with the same grave smile. Then, after a pause, "I am well satisfied with my calling, and were I to choose again could choose no other. I am rich now, dear, and hope to make such little

annoyances as this add to my treasures; also, never to forget to entertain strangers."

The father saw whither the conversation was tending, and checked himself.

"Have you spent the day happily?" he asked.

"Quite so, only I have had no time to myself. But we have had a delightful evening, and I ought not to complain of a day that has ended so pleasantly."

"Was Frank here?"

"No, papa; Mabel says he is not well."

"I saw him a moment this morning, and meant to see him again to-day, but was detained longer than I anticipated."

Ruth rose, and after a few words more bade her father good-night. She had no sooner gone than the good man fell upon his knees. How could he rest while she, so dear to him, was still at enmity with her Saviour, scorning all his prof-fers of mercy, and even denying the right of her Maker to her homage. He remembered the prayers of her mother. Would they not be answered? His faith was weak, and God seemed slack concerning his promises. What to him were the petty annoyances to which he was every day subject? What the complaints of the disaf-

fectured ones whom he found it impossible to please and yet do his duty toward all? What the laudations his sermons received—the high position he had attained in the Church? All were nothing, absolutely nothing, when he thought of the danger of this one soul, this beautiful, winning daughter, dearer to him than his own life.

In memory he went back to the time of her birth, and saw with what thankfulness his heart had gone out to his heavenly Father for the gift of a child. Again he saw her first smile, and felt the thrill of joy it gave him. He remembered that his own hands had placed upon her brow the sign of cleansing, his own lips had publicly, as well as privately, given her to God.

Then, too, the mother, who had so sweetly taught her of the heavenly way, had been lifted up, as if the gracious Father would use the most effective means to bring the young wanderer unto him; but thus far nothing had availed. What then could the earthly father do? In utter helplessness he lifted up his prayer to the only one to whom he could go for aid, and in return came sweet words: "What man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give a serpent? If ye, then, being

evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him!"

God's love was like his toward his children, but infinitely more tender. What better assurance could he have that when he asked for such bread he should not be turned away with a stone? Oh for patience to wait the Father's time!

In the little visit in the study and the stillness of the house all the excitement of the day had fallen from Ruth, and she went to her room to think.

We do not see the glory of the promise that darkness and sorrow shall never come in heaven, until we discover what the words themselves do not reveal—that there and then *we shall not need night and pain any more*. Here they are necessities. Our weak eyes cannot bear continuous light, nor our souls continuous joy. They come arresting us with stern questions: "What doest thou?" "Whither goest thou?" and we answer according to our fidelity to God and ourselves. At night the sunlight is dead, and one by one sounds and sights have fallen after it. We are alone with God. As we lay aside the garments we have worn, so night strips from us the illusions

of the day, laying bare our deeds and our hearts for inspection. Seeking upon our beds that state of unconsciousness which is so like death, we remember that the time is surely coming, perhaps is already come, when we shall lie down and rise not; till the heavens be no more we shall not awake nor be raised out of our sleep. We tremble and are helpless. Then we cry unto God.

There shall be no night there, because illusions and weariness will be gone for ever, and there will be no need to pause and rest; no pain, because there is no sin there. We shall have passed for ever beyond the tutorage of sorrow and darkness, and thenceforth shall learn in a happier way.

First there came to Ruth the petition of the morning worship, all empty of herself. Had her father really ceased to pray for her? Perhaps she was remembered in secret—perhaps her words had led him to abandon all hope of her salvation? Was he praying now? She went softly to his door to listen, but could hear nothing. The absurdity of her position rose vividly before her. Deliberately rejecting his religion, preferring, as she said, to use her powers in a more sensible way, and, sure of his love, why should she wish for a place in his prayers?

"Education makes us slaves," she mentally ejaculated, "and we never quite escape from our master."

In obedience to a promise made to her mother, to read a chapter in the Bible every night, she read the sixth chapter of Matthew, but with so little attention that the only passage which clung to her memory was: "Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature?"

In sleep she dreamed that she was again in the parlor as she had been in the evening with Mabel, Lizzie, Angie and Walter. Suddenly a Presence appeared in their midst, wonderful, glorious, but stern and awful. She knew him to be an angel. He spoke only to her:

"The eternal God has sent me to you. You do not love him, do not thank him, and would be glad to escape from his service!"

Ruth quailed under his searching gaze, but knew that she could not answer falsely, for he read all her soul.

"I renounce it!" she said.

How pitiful was the angel's face when he said:

"Since his presence is disagreeable he is going away from you now, and all his gifts will be

withdrawn. Henceforth you will not enjoy his care. Care for yourself and be free."

When these words were spoken her friends slowly disappeared, never to return to her. She cried aloud, and the family came into the room, but in a moment more all seemed to be dying. Above her father's head a crown was hanging. Mark looked smilingly up to the vision of the Elder Brother who comforted him in his sufferings, and at the same time took Lilian and Channing in his arms. She ran into the streets for help and knocked loudly at the doors, but no one heeded her, and in her agony she came back to see them fading and gasping for breath.

"O God!" she cried, "leave me, but save these dear ones!"

There came a voice: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand; but they are yours no longer."

Then they became corpses at her feet.

"Stay thy hand, mighty angel!" she said. "I am desolate, but even now will I turn to God."

"Turn if you have the power!" was the only reply.

She ran for a Bible, but found none, and then

knew that for her, at least, His word had gone out of the world. Her attempts to pray were of no avail—the words were empty. The dread angel stood looking on, and said,

“Has God taken anything he did not give?”

Looking up she saw the house crumbling rapidly to dust, and before it was time for morning it had disappeared, leaving her shelterless under a starless sky. She looked for the sun to rise, but the angel sadly shaking his head said,

“It is vain.”—She tried to leave the spot, but sank powerless to the earth.

“All now is gone,” was her cry of despair. “Nothing is left to be taken away!”

“Nothing?” questioned the voice of him she could no longer see and but faintly hear. Then in a terrible rushing wind all the air was swept away, leaving her a breathless body.

“Can you not keep your own heart beating?” said the still fainter voice—“you who would live without God?”

“Alas! how can I?” she thought, but could not say, and the heart stopped—the body was dead.

God had made her soul immortal; it could not be blotted out, but all the avenues between it and other souls, and those by which it took cognizance

of material things being cut off, it was conscious only of its own existence, and unable to decide whether its home was still in the body, with which it had no connection, or whether it floated off in empty space. There was nothing to hope for, nothing to do but to remember.

Ruth awoke with an exceeding sense of weariness, and a still more exceeding gladness, to find herself yet in the body, reclining upon her bed, with dear friends and all other God-given possessions around her. But gladness is not gratitude. A revelation of her utter dependence, so vivid that it was impossible to turn away from it, had come, laying bare her unthankfulness, but in Him who has given us all things to enjoy she could see no loveliness.

"I cannot love from the mere sense of duty," she said, and with that answer tried to silence the inward voice beseeching her to give heed to the monitions of her dream. The struggle lasted far into the night, when she turned again into the enjoyment of that blessed repose which "He giveth his beloved," and does not deny even to his enemies.



CHAPTER IV.

MRS. JENNISON.

RUTH was not herself the next morning, and her depression of spirits did not wear off as the day advanced. The conflict of the night had been renewed with her waking hours, and had made her irritable.

"You are sick, and I'm going to make you some boneset tea," Mrs. Jennison said when Mr. McMinn had gone. Ruth had surprised the family by a tirade on the annoyances to which the households of clergymen were subject.

"Thank you, aunty; but boneset tea will do me no good, for I am quite well in body. I am thoroughly out of patience, though, to think that people will act so. I have borne it cheerfully long enough to have the privilege of giving vent to a little spleen."

"That is a dangerous luxury, dear," said her father, gravely, "and not always as agreeable to

those who look on and listen as to them who indulge in it."

"I believe it is a good thing once in a while," said the daughter, turning to her dusting.

Just before going to school Mark came to have a button sewed on.

"What a harum-scarum, reckless fellow you are! What would you do if you hadn't a sister to take care of you?" said Ruth.

"Don't scold, but hurry, now," said Mark, "for the first bell has rung."

"What if it has? I can't help it. You shouldn't have been so careless!"

"You cross old thing! Now, do be quick and fix my collar! You don't hurry one bit!"

"Aren't you ashamed, Mark, to talk so, when I am doing my best?—you who profess better things!"

"I suppose it was wrong." The boy's countenance fell slightly, then flashed with indignation. "But who begun it? If you don't profess better things, you ought to: you're the oldest."

"Chil'wen!" said Lilian, pausing before them with the look of reproof and gesture of the hand with which their father frequently spoke. The imitation was so perfect, and so droll that both

laughed, and it had the effect of softening Ruth's voice, when, having completed the work, she dismissed Mark with a kiss, saying, "There! go and be a better boy."

He did not like to be kissed, he was too large.

"That's all his religion amounts to," she said, mentally, when he was gone. But on thinking over her own words and actions she could not help being ashamed. Proud of her own amiability and self-control, anxious to be perfect in the eyes of the younger children, she was sorry to have given way to anger so foolishly.

Going away to the quietest part of the house, she applied herself to study, but with little success. The dream haunted her; the course Frank Hope had taken was vexing, and a thousand other less important things came up to distract her attention. Her heart ached, and she had half a mind to go to aunty for the boneset tea. Time did not wait, however; the recitation hour came, and Mabel with it. Mabel looked as though she had been crying.

"I haven't a bit of lesson," said Ruth as they entered the study.

"And I not much more. I came to hear you."

"Better try this again, when you have clearer

heads and less to think of," said Mr. Hawthorne, after they had vainly endeavored to tell that of which they knew nothing.

Ruth went out with Mabel, but they had nothing to talk about, as they usually had, and the latter went away with scarcely a word. Mr. Hawthorne who was watching, stepped into the hall:

"You are not well to-day, are you, Ruth?"

"No, papa, I don't believe I am," she replied, leaning against him and bursting into tears.

"Is there anything you can tell me?"

"Nothing at all. I don't know what is the matter, only I am very foolish and silly."

He passed his hand caressingly over her head, but said nothing, and soon Ruth returned to her room, threw herself upon the couch and wept bitterly. Mrs. Jennison had seen her go, and followed her.

"You poor child! you poor child! I knew ye was sick. Now, tell aunty what it is," she said, kneeling and slipping her arm under the girl's head, thus drawing it to herself. "There, now! cry all ye want to, and when ye git ready tell aunty what 'tis that ails ye, whether it's headache or heartache. She knows all about it—she's been just so herself. She's had to go to the same doc-

tor you'll have to go to. It's the Great Physician, Ruth. He can cure all this aching inside, no matter what it comes from. Come, now, don't get away, but let a poor old woman that ha'n't got nothin' but a heart and some blessed words the Lord Jesus has put into it, comfort ye as ye'r own mother would—just as near as she can."

Ruth, who had wept all the harder while the nurse was talking, now sobbed out, "Oh, my mother! Why did God take her away?"

She held her breath as soon as the words were spoken, and thinking of the dream wondered how she dared to utter them.

"Why? I suppose he knows that best himself, but I saw a reason that was all plain to me a good while ago. I think it's just because you wa'n't layin' up no treasure in heaven yerself, but was so taken up with them ye was heapin' up down here that ye couldn't once look that way. He saw how ye loved her; and well ye might, dear child. He saw it, and lifted her up so ye could have a treasure there, and ye'r heart would go too. He hoped if he had her close by himself that when ye was straining ye'r eyes to see her, ye'd catch a glimpse of him, and see how bright and good and lovin' he is, and that ye'r treasure

here wa'n't worth nothin' compared with what ye might have there—'twouldn't last any. But treasure there would never fade, or change, or pass away. Isn't that about it, think?"

Ruth's natural enmity came to her aid, her will was roused, and the tears ceased to flow:

"You talk about God, aunty, as though he were a man. He doesn't hope—he doesn't try experiments. Far back in eternity he knew all about me, I suppose, and appointed me to be saved or lost, and as he appointed it will be. I cannot change it—there's no appeal—he knows."

"So he did know ye, dear, 'way back long before the world. I don't s'pose he's forgot ye once since then, either; and, knowin' ye, didn't he know what ye need? I should think ye'd feel how good 'tis to be cared for for ever. Does it make any difference when 'twas planned? Why, dear, I can't talk in no other way than as if he was a man. I'm nothin' but a poor, insignificant woman, that's never learned much that they teach in this world even. I don't know how else to say it. But I do know that what you want now is jest to go and put your troubles down before him. Tell him all out—don't keep nothin' back—and ye'll find him tenderer and more feelin'

an' comfortin' to ye than yer mother could ever have been."

"No. You may think so," said Ruth, "but I cannot possibly feel as you do—I never shall. To me he is the mighty God, with immutable laws from which he never turns aside, who says to some of the undying spirits he creates: 'I love you, will save you, and you shall be happy, praising me always;' but to the rest he says: 'You shall perish. It makes no difference how much good you do, how gentle, pleasant and cultivated you are, how well fitted for the society of the pure; you do not see fit to praise me, therefore you shall go away among the lost.' I am one of the latter class, not elected; therefore the more I suffer the better."

"You poor, blind child! Here you've built a little fire of hate in your heart, and it's smoked and smoked and made a cloud so big that ye can't see nothin' above ye as 'tis, and the great God sits up there pityin' ye and tryin' to get ye to come out of the dark. Ye don't mean to see how he spreads out the green grass carpet for wicked feet as well as good ones; makes the rain and the sunshine come down on the just and the unjust; that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to

anger and plenteous in mercy. He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.' 'The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance.'"

"He could easily bring everybody to repentance. He has the power. Why doesn't he then?"

"I've heard—I never see 'em, but I've heard—of real smart machines that acted 'most like folks. I s'pose God might have made us like them, and then made us go any way he wanted us to. I s'pose he could have made things that would say 'Alleluiah,' 'Glory,' and all them bright words in jest the sweetest way, like musical instruments. But he wouldn't have liked that. He wanted folks that knew something and could feel to come all of their own accord and thank him for makin' them so happy and doin' so much for 'em. Why, when you've done somethin' nice for Lily don't you want her to say 'Thank you?' Of course ye do, but it ain't for yerself ye want the words; ye want her to feel thankful. 'Twould be a bad sign if she didn't. Now that's just what the alleluiahs and the glorys is—nothin' but thank-you's to God. He wants us to be grateful

and tell him so, because that makes us happy, and he wants us to be happy. And I tell ye, when a body begins to feel thankful to him, there ain't no words rich enough to tell it in. I suppose they don't use them words up in heaven, but that's the nearest we can git to what they do say."

"But all are not so happy. Those immutable laws work good to some and evil to others. Some poor wretches seem never to have anything to be thankful for," said Ruth.

"Why, don't you know that happiness is all inside? 'Tain't round about us, unless it shines out through us, so that everybody else gits a little of it. Anybody can be happy that's a mind to; it's *whosoever will* that may take of the water of life freely, and the water of life is happiness, or else makes it wherever 'tis. Nothin' to be thankful for? Didn't Jesus die for them? Don't the warm sun shine, the little flowers blow, and the sky look bright, and some love come to everybody? Won't heaven belong to whosoever will?"

"I am afraid not, aunty. Think of the hosts of heathen in our own and other countries, who have never heard of God, and therefore cannot

worship him. What chance have they of heaven? Your 'whosoever will' seems to fail there."

"I don't pretend to know what his plan is about them, but one thing I know, he'll always deal fair—won't ask nobody to do more than they can. His mercy endureth for ever. But of them that have a great deal he'll require a great deal."

Mrs. Jennison had not been carried thus far through life on flowery beds of ease. She had been born and reared in a little, rude home, built at first in the forest, some of whose trees were left standing when the wood was cleared away to make the dwelling pleasant. Around the door in summer were sunshine and green grass; in winter there was heaped the beautiful snow. Within it was made pleasant by love. A sturdy father and cheerful mother gazed with pride upon a group of children as merry as ever gathered around a cottage hearth. Sometimes food was scarce and clothing scanty; but all privations were endured without a murmur, because they had never known and were not anticipating greater comforts. As years passed on the older ones went away to work, and at length to homes of their own, and then the little ones had shoes.

She too grew old; a new happiness had come,

and she bade adieu to the dear, lowly spot to go with him her heart had chosen. Then her great love cast its beauty over everything she saw and transfigured all. There was little pain, little gloom. In the midst of this brightness she heard the loving voice of Him who spake as never man spake, claiming a love still greater, and it was given. The affection bestowed upon her husband was not taken back, but redoubled and purified. Knowing little of this world's wisdom, she had not the faintest shadow of a doubt as to the truth of the faith she had accepted, but, feeling the fullness of content with her possessions here, yet "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Oh happiness, not to see all the earth darkened before we discover the light of heaven!

The world did grow dark. The husband turned away from wife and children, and one sad day they were left alone. For weeks the wife lay in anguish, knowing little of what went on around her, hardly realizing what it was that wounded her. But the refuge in distress did not fail; she was hidden in the pavilion of the Most High, and found him a very present help.

Although left in poverty, through the kindness

of friends and by hard work she managed to provide for herself and two little girls until God took one of them home; and when the other was old enough to go out to service, the mother also went as nurse. Poor and unfortunate as they were, they were greatly respected, and "Aunt Jenny," as she in time came to be called, was truly beloved.

In the Hawthorne family, Aunt Jenny was sent for invariably when any one was sick, and the children were delighted to have her in the house, she loved everybody so. All their little plans and griefs were poured into her sympathizing ear. She had a keen eye to detect suffering of any kind, and could feel for it. If one of the children—having a headache or other ache which the mother taught them not to mind—feeling peevish, went to Aunt Jenny, he was sure not to be turned off, the ailment was recognized and assumed its due proportions. She knew just how it felt, and the little sufferer had a soft pillow on her lounge, and all the care it was in her power to give so long as he felt it a pleasure to be ailing. There happened no accident by which a toe was bruised or finger cut but if she were within reach the news was immediately communicated to her. And so, when a child was ill, if no immediate

danger was apprehended, Aunt Jenny was sent for rather than the doctor. It was almost a luxury to be sick under her tender care.

When Mrs. Hawthorne lingered for a few weeks after Channy's birth in that sad region close down by the river of death, Mrs. Jennison had been with her, and had made a promise to remain with the children when they should be motherless, and now, if Channy did sometimes suffer a little from over-feeding and over-dosing, or was kept too much excluded from the fresh air, his father felt that he was in the safest hands that could be found to hold him; he would never want for care, and the love he received would approximate the most nearly to a mother's love.





CHAPTER V.

MARK.

IT is hardly possible for a boy of twelve years to be more intelligent in the exercise of faith and love, or more sincere in his professions, than Mark was when uniting with the church. With all his soul he cried, "My father, thou art the guide of my youth," and it would seem that, in view of his careful training and the help he would receive at home, the narrow way would be to him comparatively easy. But he had an impetuous nature which could only be toned down by a long course of self-discipline. Though he had set out to control himself with a love for goodness and a reliance upon a higher Power, which were sure in the end to accomplish his purpose, he was frequently thrown off his guard and overcome for a time. His impulses were generous, but his temper being quick and

an exceeding frankness leading him to speak whatever was passing in his mind, he often found himself involved in little quarrels where there was no real enmity. Seeing this, in his calmer moments he would say to himself: "Next time I *will* think and do better. O Saviour, help me to think! do not leave me to myself!" But while many times the prayer was answered and the resolution kept, often the temptation, coming in a new form, was not recognized until it had been yielded to. Now he had sinned again and was in bitter sorrow.

Ruth, who had no appreciation of such struggles, had little confidence in his piety. She demanded as a fruit of conversion that one should become perfect at once, forgetting that if all grace were given or attained at first, there would be no need of growth. Instead of seeing that, while actuated by new motives and devoting himself to the Saviour, he must still be a boy, with the same temperament he had before, throwing aside her usual good sense, she demanded of him the firmness, patience, discretion and soberness of a Christian *man*. Mark felt hurt by her distrust, and to prove that she was wrong tried to set a double watch over all his thoughts and words.

When he went home on the Sabbath afternoon after making his public vows, there were no lions in his way. He loved everybody so much that there seemed to be no danger of his speaking harshly or getting into a quarrel again. God seemed to be hovering over him with sheltering wings, gazing down into his face with a smile. He could almost see him, and it was sweet to feel him so near. It was a delightful path he had found instead of a "strait and thorny road." In his little room, flooded with the glories of the sunset, he ascended his mount of transfiguration. What matter to him then what Ruth and some others thought? He knew whom he believed—knew that he loved.

The next morning the world was colder, his thoughts could not climb so high, and God seemed farther off; yet there was no wavering, and he felt sure that he should never falter. The hurt on his hand made him feel somewhat sensitive, but that must not be minded, and on his way to school he tried to think whether any of the boys seemed to have anything against him; he had nothing against them, for all was forgiven.

Yes, Henry Wilson had been vexed with him

on Friday night, and at that time he could not guess the cause, but now it flashed upon him. He would go straight and have it explained, for he did not wish even to seem to dishonor his Saviour. Fortunately, Henry was the first one he could speak to on entering the gate.

"Good-morning, Henry."

Henry did not answer.

"Why, you are not mad with me yet, are you?"

"Yes, I am."

"I knew you were the other night, but I couldn't think till this morning what it was for. You thought I carried your grammar out and hid it under the steps, didn't you?"

"Yes, and you did, too, so I couldn't have any lesson, and you'd stand above me. I told Mr. Mills all about it though, and you'll catch it—you see if you don't!"

The blood rushed to Mark's face, but he controlled himself and spoke pleasantly.

"Henry, don't you remember that you carried it out yourself at recess Thursday afternoon, and showed me that picture Newt Brown had been making of me?"

"Yes, but I carried it in again."

"You laid it down when we went to playing ball, and then, you know, it began to rain. I said: 'Henry, your grammar will get wet.' You said you guessed not; but Thede Smith saw it and slipped it under there, and told you so, but you were so busy you didn't hear. I meant to tell you before we went in, but I never thought of it till it was found there Friday night. Wasn't that so, Thede?"

"I put it under there and told him so," said Theodore.

"Well, maybe that was the way," said Henry; "but I never should have thought of it again. I thought I carried it in."

"I say," spoke Martyn Hyde, "Mark joined the church yesterday."

"*He* did? So did I just as much!" said Stephen Goodwin, to whom the remark was addressed.

"Did you, Mark?" asked Theodore.

"Yes."

"Humph!" said Stephen, "I think I will too."

"You ar'n't ready," said Theodore.

"Just as much as he is. Which has the most quarrels or gets spoken to oftener in school, he or I, say?"

Mark, afraid of saying something wrong, tried to go in.

"Don't be scared off," said Martyn.

"No, stay and speak for yourself," cried Stephen. "I'll leave it to the boys which of us gets into disgrace oftener."

"If you don't, it is no sign you don't cut up most," said Theodore. "He'll own up, but you're sly and not a bit afraid to tell a fib. I know you to a t."

Stephen laughed.

"Boys," said Mark, "I do forget and do wrong very often, but I am always sorry for it, for I'm trying to do right."

If Ruth could have seen her brother then, she would have been forced to the conclusion that something above nature prompted him to such bravery and yet such meekness. Once he would not have said that.

Mark did not feel quite right toward Stephen, however, and found himself mentally saying: "I'll show him! I'll teach him!" Perhaps the Holy Spirit dropped a thought into his mind just then in answer to prayer, for the boy smiled and added: "Yes, I will show him in the Saviour's own way. I'll be just as kind to him as I can;" and

again went up on high the petition for help and strength.

All the day passed pleasantly. Mark was not once reproved either at school or at home. Night found him in difficulty with no one, cherishing the kindest feelings toward all, and happy, not as he had been the evening before, but in the consciousness of having overcome.

But the next morning came that altercation with Ruth, and he went off to school miserable enough. No wonder she did not think him a Christian! How could he hope to influence her to become one? It would have made his mother sorry to hear it.

Then he remembered being alone with his mother when she lay so pale upon her bed, only a little while before her death. She had clasped him in her arms, and said how much she hoped he would be a true boy and grow up to be a pure-hearted, noble man. She was anxious that he should be gentlemanly and brotherly toward his sisters, and have deference for Ruth's opinion and wishes as far as was right. She was going away never to come back, and it would be hard for Ruth to have so much care. Mark must help her all he could and try to make her happy.

Would he be a child of God, and come to her in heaven when his work was all done here? She was most anxious about that, for she could not bear to think of parting with him for ever, or that he would never be fitted for that sinless place. Then he had told her, sobbing, and uttering the words for the first time, that he had given his heart to the Saviour; he would try to be good to Ruth and the little ones, and every day he would pray to his heavenly Father to help him. She wept too, though she looked glad, and kissing him, asked God to bless her darling boy and keep him from evil. He hoped she couldn't see up in heaven what he had done that morning.

While Mark was thinking this over he believed himself to be studying arithmetic, learning the rule for finding the greatest common divisor. But he had not yet put down self or shut his eyes to the faults of others. After all, he thought, Ruth was most to blame, and the idea of asking her forgiveness when he went home was by no means pleasing.

“‘Divide the greater number by the less, then divide the preceding divisor by the last remainder, and so on till nothing remains.’ Whew! don't believe I'll do it. ‘The last divisor’—maybe though

that'll be turning the other cheek. I think I will, but I'll never say the fault was all in me, for 'twasn't. 'The last divisor will be the greatest common divisor.' I should like to know how they make that out."

At dinner the family were unusually serious. Ruth's face wore traces of tears, and though she tried to be sprightly, it was evidently hard work. Mark was glad when he could leave the table and go out into the garden to shout and jump. He expected Noel Brainard to come into the adjoining garden so soon as he saw him, but no such boy made his appearance, and finding nothing especially interesting to keep him in the hot sun, he went slowly back into the house, thinking over the affairs of the morning, and wondering if there were any connection between them and Ruth's tear-stained face. Finding his sister alone, he approached her somewhat awkwardly, with his head down.

"Ruth, you know that spat we had this morning?"

"Well?"

"Well, I want to make a bargain with you; if you'll ask my forgiveness I'll ask yours, and will call it square and make up. Do you agree?"

"That is a strange proposition," said the young lady, half smiling, half frowning, "which means that if I will say the fault was mine and humbly beg your pardon, you will grant it and condescend to admit that you were slightly to blame also."

"Now, Woodie, you know I didn't mean any such thing; but we were both to blame. I don't know which was most, but I'm sorry; and since you're a young lady, and I'm nothing but a boy, I'll ask first; so here goes: Ruth, will you forgive me? But mind now! you've got to ask mine; no backing out."

"There's been no agreement yet on my part," said Ruth, laughing at her brother's droll earnestness, "and I suppose you don't want me to answer your question."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I do forgive you, and will brother Mark please pardon his sister for the unkind words he fancies she has spoken to him?"

"Fancies! I never said so! I tell you, if you didn't speak sharp and strong, then my name isn't— There, I didn't say anything! Now, Woodie, that isn't the way to make up."

"Well, then, to please you: the unkind words

that she spoke to him this morning. Will that do?"

"Tolerable, only I don't like so much teasing to get it out. I should just like to know that you mean it as well as I did."

"Well, I do mean it. I am ashamed of what I said, and hope we shall both control ourselves better hereafter. Will that do?"

"Yes, that's fair;" and he went off whistling. "Made her own up, didn't I?" he said, boastingly, to himself. Then, his face suddenly growing grave, "Why, I shall have to go back and ask her forgiveness again for my thoughts. When shall I learn to be good?"

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CHAPTER VI.

NOEL.

THE Hawthorne family, sitting at breakfast, were startled by loud cries in the house nearest them, where Mrs. Lee lived with her two daughters, Mrs. Walton and Lizzie Lee. Mr. Hawthorne sprang from his seat, but Mark solved the mystery.

"Hallo! there goes No-brains turning it up strong! I wonder if he's getting a li—whipping this morning?" and Mark was about to leave the table, bread and butter in hand, to go to the window to look, when a reproof from his father kept him in his place.

"What name did you speak just now?"

"No-brains, sir. He's the boy that's come to live with Mrs. Walton. That's what all the boys at school call him."

"And you take 'all the boys' for your pattern?"

"No, papa, but then—"

"Would you like to have them call you by such a name?"

"Oh, he don't care, and that just describes him."

"There is a certain old rule in a certain old book which applies in this case, and is the very best rule for gentlemanly conduct everywhere; I hoped you had learned it. But are you sure it was Noel Brainard we heard?"

"Yes, sir; but I'll go and find out."

"There's no necessity. If he were seriously hurt, he would not be likely to make so much noise; and if an accident has happened and we are needed, we shall be apprised of it."

"May I be 'scused?" asked Lily.

Being answered in the affirmative, she slipped quietly out of the room.

"Did you say 'accident,' papa?" inquired Ruth. "Why, it is no uncommon occurrence for him to use his vocal powers in that style. Lizzie says Mrs. Walton finds it a great task to take care of him."

"I am sorry for that child," remarked Mrs. Jennison. "He seems to be a good-hearted boy."

"His mother is dead, and now he's driven from home," said Ruth.

"Do you *know* that?" asked Mr. Hawthorne, "or have you only heard so?"

"He gets it in the school, don't he, though?" said Mark. "Nobody knows what to do with him there. Mr. Mills had him first, and kept him sitting on the platform all the time. Then he turned him over to Miss Colton, and now he's in Miss Fisk's room. And he's as old as I be, every bit."

"Oh no, Mark," said Ruth.

"Yes he is too! I heard his father tell Mr. Mills."

While the family were discussing Noel, Lily was investigating. First, she paused on the piazza, then went down on the walk and off into the wet grass, gathering dandelions. The boy came out with hair nicely combed and his large eyes bright as ever.

"I've had my bweaksuf," said Lily, looking through the fence.

"We're jest a-goin' to eat."

"Pwob'ly you got hu't, No."

"What?"

"Pwob'ly you got hu't when you quied, I said."

"Hurt? No I didn't."

"What you quy for, den?"

"Mrs. Walton was washing me, and she washes awful hard!"

"I don't quy when I'm washed."

Noel being called in just here, Lily found she had dandelions enough. "See my fwowes," she said, holding them up for her father to smell, and then laughing heartily to find damp yellow dust on his nose.

"And see my Lily's feet! Oh, naughty Lily, to go out in the wet grass!"

"I saw Noel."

"There's the secret," said Ruth.

"I know what for he quied."

"What was it?" said Mark.

"'Cause dey washed him," the little girl's face and voice doing their utmost to express the indignation she felt.

"There! I knew it was that," said Mark.

"How *could* you know it?" said Ruth.

"Why, easy enough. Don't you suppose I can read Noel Brainard?"

"Perhaps you think so, but you had no *knowledge* of what was going on."

"Well, I could guess."

"Guessing is not knowing, and to speak so is not telling the truth."

"You think I told a lie, then."

"No, indeed, Mark, you wouldn't do that. But I am afraid you wanted to impress us with the idea that you knew a great deal more than you really did. If you will think a minute, you will see it so."

"I hope everybody that lives in this house will learn that lesson."

"Get your Bibles," said Mr. Hawthorne.

In the course of that day the father had a long talk with Mark alone, and another with Ruth.

Noel Brainard's father was Mrs. Lee's nephew, whose wife God, in his providence, had taken, leaving two boys motherless. After a few years he had married a second time, but the new wife, young, gay and eager for pleasure, had little inclination to be troubled with the ungainly Noel, of whom neither his parents nor any of the many women to whose care he had been at different times committed had been able to make anything. Mrs. Walton, who had buried both her husband and only child, had been persuaded to take him, knowing that to succeed she must have long patience and superabundant hope. He was, as Mark had said, twelve years old, but, though not

smaller than many other children of his age, seemed to be much younger. He was short, stoutly built, had a round, chubby face, with a profusion of brown curls clustering round it, and a pair of large, dark gray eyes shining out of it. That face the sun and wind kept considerably darker than it naturally was, yet it was very pleasant to look upon when it was clean. Aye, there's the rub—when it was clean! For he had such an affinity for dirt that it clung to him when it would have fallen from other children, and an attempt to remove it almost broke his heart. In school his hands readily found whatever dust the careless sweeper had left upon the desk, and contributed a share to his face, and his slate was constantly yielding an amount of filth that was wonderful, seeing that it never appeared to have lost any. If he went to the black-board to work an example, the eraser in his left hand was quite as much a necessity as the crayon in the right, for he was so eager to make his figures that they rarely met his approbation, but must be rubbed out and another onset made, and while he paused to make computations the eraser wandered to the top of his head or around to his back, leaving generous deposits of white powder.

"How did you get so dirty?" Mrs. Walton would ask when he went home.

"I don't know," he would answer with innocent surprise. "I ha'n't done nothing."

It was of no avail to send him to wash himself.

On entering school he was subjected to the usual examination, but the teacher who performed that duty felt herself quite as much at a loss as to where he belonged when she stopped questioning as when she began. He had commenced most of his answers correctly, but in his hurry nothing was finished as it should be. The words given him to spell were ingeniously if not correctly lettered; few of his examples in arithmetic were properly done; but he told large stories of the ground he had gone over with such earnestness and apparent honesty that she was quite mystified. So he was classed at first with boys of his own age, but his unusual activity both of body and tongue made it necessary for the teacher to locate him near herself on the platform. Here, every day, the little fellow plunged fiercely into his studies, rose unharmed, gave another dive, came up again and floated. Occasionally he went down for the third time, but never sank into continuous study. From the moment when

this operation was concluded his eyes wandered over the school-room in search of entertainment; he made his own comments on each individual, sometimes telegraphing them on such lines as are common in like places, and being extremely well satisfied when he could make one of his fellow-pupils laugh. Almost every day the little bent shoulders became so tired from having nothing to lean against, and the eyes so weary of looking over the whole scene, that by and by the head rested against the teacher's desk and he was fast asleep.

He was very soon found to be in classes far beyond him, and was sent to Miss Colton. His woe-begone face on going into her room elicited many a smile, nor was he cheered by the prospect of having a seat with a desk, for experience had taught him that he need not expect to keep it. A week here, during which Miss Colton suffered untold vexations and annoyances in trying to tame him, and he was turned over to Miss Fisk. This time he wept bitterly. He had never had to sit with such little scholars before since he was born.

But though feeling himself disgraced, he soon was happier here than he had been anywhere else.

When Noel first came to Hopeton in the spring of that same year, Mark, glad to have so near a neighbor of his own age, was all attention. He took him over the village, and showed him the wonders thereof—the falls, and where were the best places in the river to fish, the big factory, and told him about the boys, whom he would like and with whom it was best not to get acquainted. He succeeded, too, in getting him into his own class in the Sunday-school, contrary to the wishes of the superintendent. But, on discovering what were his attainments, and how little his advice in various matters was heeded, feeling that he had been imposed upon, Mark was so indignant as to want nothing to do with Noel. It being plain that this spirit was not right, and having no lack of faith in the efficacy of Christian effort, he resolved to attempt Noel's reformation, musing thus:

"Here's No Brainard come to live close by me, who, I think, is pretty near a heathen. He doesn't know anything. I don't suppose he really knows who made him. A boy that spells so many words wrong can't know much about the Saviour, that's certain. Of course it's my duty to play with him, and I shall, because there isn't

any other boy so near that he can be with. But I don't like to. He spoils everything. I never get even a bite when we go fishing together, for you might as well coax the wind to be still. He don't know any more about base ball and other things that we play than Lily, not one bit. 'But if I keep on and play with him patiently.' I wasn't made patient, but if I *can* be patient and show him, maybe he'll improve. It's too bad for him to grow up so ignorant.

"Of course he'll like me, and I can have as much influence over him as anybody else, maybe more, since my father is such a good man, a minister too. I'm sorry for boys whose fathers aren't ministers. Every one has some influence, and I'm going to use mine all for good. God will help me, and I am going to see what I can do for No. I won't say 'No Brains' any more, for that isn't right. If I could help to make him a good boy, wouldn't it be nice? I'm going to have a good long talk with him in such a kind way that he—that it can't help doing him good."

But Mark found it difficult to make calculations about Noel. For the conversation he appointed the next Sabbath morning on the way to church, for Noel was fond of going with "

Hawthornes, and was always ready to join them as soon as they made their appearance at the door. Mark therefore urged that Lily should walk with his father and Ruth while he went behind alone. As was expected, Noel overtook them before they had gone many steps, but instead of staying with Mark, rushed by without the slightest sign of recognition, and tried to crowd in with the three. Finding the walk not broad enough he went on before, until Lily stepped back to be company for Mark, when Noel was most happy to take her place, and though occasionally looking round to speak to her, he still seemed utterly oblivious of the presence of her brother.

The boy was disappointed; but the next day when he was hoeing his corn, Noel came over to see him.

"Don't you suppose I can hoe better than that?"

"No," said Mark, "I do not."

"Well, I can. I've hoed lots. My father has a big farm, and raises—oh, more'n five hundred bushels! And last year I hoed it all."

"Oh what a story! You don't mean, though, to say you gave it all the hoeing it had?"

"No, but I hoed a good deal of it; then they wouldn't let me do any more."

"Why not?"

"'Cause they said I cut it off, but it was no such thing. I can do it ever so much faster than you, see if I can't," taking hold of the instrument.

Mark yielded, protesting, however, against having his corn cut off.

Down went the hoe into the ground with all the child's force, then up again, scattering the earth to a distance of several feet. Mark seized it.

"Don't do any more, don't! Noel, do you know that you don't do anything like other folks? You must be more careful, and take more time, so as to do things as men do."

"Why, I do now."

"I should think you did! Do you love the Saviour?"

"Of course I do."

Mark had not anticipated this reply. He had doubts.

"What makes you love him?"

"'Cause other folks do."

"A good many folks don't. Do you pray?"

"What? Kneeling down? Why, yes."

"You *do*!" Mark's voice expressed the utmost incredulity, and he could scarcely refrain from saying: "I don't believe it."

"Do you ask God every night to take care of you while you sleep, and thank him for his goodness in the morning?"

"Yes."

Mark was nonplussed.

"Do you always tell the truth?"

Again came the affirmative, and Noel shook his curls, plunged his hands deep in his pockets, and galloped away.

"I wonder if he has any conscience?" said Mark, following him with his eyes.





CHAPTER VII.

FRANK, AND PLEASANT EVENINGS.

THE ground where the village of Hopeton stood had once been owned by Calvin Hope, who had first built the large woolen factory and the mills that stood on the bank of the river. He had given the ground for the first church, and had been chiefly instrumental in its erection ; he had engaged the first minister, built the first school-house, and reserving the best one hundred acres for himself, had offered his lands for sale on such reasonable terms that farmers found it desirable to buy. Many mechanics, too, were drawn thither by cheap homes and plenty of work, and so the town sprang up and took the name of its founder.

Mr. Hope's mantle had fallen upon his son, the present Deacon Hope, now an old man. He had kept the farm and brought it to a high state of cultivation ; had rebuilt and enlarged the factory

and the mills, and kept them steadily and successfully at work, thus giving employment to many more men than his father had needed, and so directing all things that they moved on with scarcely a jar. He was a worker with hands as well as head, who went about with so little pretension that a stranger would not have taken him for the master of so much wealth. He was a man of great deliberation, moderate in all his movements and slow of speech, but he seldom spoke at random, and rarely changed his mind.

As a Christian he was always at his post, and Mr. Hawthorne had found him his truest friend and most reliable counsellor.

His family of eight children were all grown. Of his four sons two were merchants in a Western city, one was a lawyer nearer home; Frank and Mabel only were unmarried.

Frank was a son after his father's own heart. Inheriting his love and aptitude for business he was at an early age so well acquainted with its details that he could be safely left to manage it alone for weeks. A natural mechanic, he was so fond of one of the branches of labor as to devote himself to it steadily, month after month, becoming a superior workman, while at the same time

his evenings were devoted to study. Frank had no disposition to be behind in anything, but school being irksome to him, it was decided that he should fit for college under the tuition of a retired college professor, a resident of the place, whom he greatly admired. Keeping at work as he did, he was necessarily longer about it than most young men, and was only ready now at the age of twenty-one. Yet in mental development, depth and breadth of culture he had gained vastly by the delay.

Frank and Mabel loved each other as brother and sister do not always. He had few enjoyments which he did not wish her to share, and was rewarded with her fullest confidence. She was seventeen—a year older than Ruth—tall and slender, with a winning but not handsome face. Though rarely sick, she seemed to be frail, and her parents considered themselves fortunate when Mr. Hawthorne consented to instruct her with Ruth, thus saving her from the confinement of the school-room.

With these two companions Ruth had been associated intimately from her earliest years, and she was scarcely less dear to them than they were to each other.

When about ten years old, Mabel thought she gave her heart to the Saviour; but that was disagreeable to Frank, who had no such love himself. Her friends, fearing that it was only a childish impulse which would soon wear away, did not encourage her to make a profession of her faith, and by and by she ceased to speak of it, but tried to keep it hidden in her heart, until, too closely shut up, the little flame seemed to have died out.

Two years had elapsed since Frank subscribed for a nominally scientific periodical in which the truths of Christianity were insidiously attacked. Ruth, eager to learn everything, had the papers to read, and soon the three began to speak to each other of the doubts so congenial to the natural heart, to be charmed with their own logic and take pleasure in its conclusions. This was not new to Frank, who accepted few things simply because he had been taught them, and to whom the faith of his father was strangely unreasonable. The girls at first had little idea whither they were tending, but at length the cross came to mean only the barbarous death of a good but infatuated man, and "Ye must be born again" to be an idle sentence. Mabel, who still knelt to



The Literary Circle.

say in a heartless manner, "Our Father which art in heaven," was the slowest to accept these new ideas, and Ruth, glad to escape any form of devotion, was the most eager. Against the service of Christ her spirit had always rebelled, though urged by conscience to accept it, and it was a relief when she could silence that inward voice by calling it foolishness. If there was an honest doubter among them, it was Frank.

At length they began to meet regularly for the discussion of these topics, and, being joined by a very few sympathetic friends, formed themselves into a society whose meetings were called "Pleasant Evenings." To these visitors were never to be invited; there was to be extreme care in receiving members, and, under cover of the terms "Literary" and "Social," the main objects of the society were to be kept a secret.

All the members went to church more or less regularly, because it was customary and out of deference to their parents. Frank, Mabel and Ruth were constant in their attendance at prayer-meeting, but they were all glad to find there, as they usually did, something to criticise. They learned the possibility of hearing yet not hearing, of seeing and failing to perceive, though they

had no suspicion that their hearts were "waxing gross and their ears dull."

Frank's teacher, a wise Christian, discovering the difficulties of his pupil, led him by a circuitous route to see something of the fallacy and absurdity of his position. The young man, amazed, tried to get back to his old stand-point, but with little success. He attended the "Pleasant Evenings," and there endeavored to argue himself back into his former security, but could not, and when at the communion service Mr. Hawthorne held up before him Christ crucified for men, his eyes were opened to see his need of a Saviour. Then, for the first time, he revealed to the two girls his dissatisfaction. That and the stand taken in the evening gave him strength. He sought instruction and sat humbly at the feet of men whose teachings he had not long ago despised, and when Mr. Hawthorne visited him on Tuesday morning was ready to give up everything that he might win Christ.

Was it by ceasing to think that he had reached this point? By giving up reason and being blindly led by feeling? No! On the contrary, he had never thought more calmly and seriously, never arrived at conclusions more unwillingly. A

divine Hand had touched his eyes, a divine Teacher, with illuminating power, had entered his heart. It was the work of the Spirit of God. Now he studied the Bible instead of the works of its opposers, and, as is always the case, the more he studied, the more wonderful it became—a message to needy finite souls from the bounteous, infinite God. And so he learned to accept what he could not explain, hoping in the fullness of time to be “able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.”

Thus in a time of religious apathy Frank Hope became a Christian. At first he said nothing to Mabel, more than he had done on that Sabbath, having little hope of her sympathy; but she watched him, and was only half sorry for the change. Her nature, whose life was affection, had felt vaguely the emptiness of the theories in which she had endeavored to establish herself, and had been dimly conscious of the hunger that comes from feeding on husks instead of the bread of life. She knew that her brother was right, but was too proud to say it. She waited for him to speak, and the time came.

"When you were a little girl," he said, "you thought you found the Saviour, but I, loving him not, sought to lead you away. What success I had you know best. Can it be that we have changed places now?"

"I think we have," was the deliberate reply.

"I did you a great wrong then in my blind egotism and selfishness. I cannot think you, who are always so nearly right, would have wandered so but for me; forgive me, my sister. I wish I could lead you back."

There was Frank, her manly brother, trembling like a reed, with tears rolling down his cheeks. She made no reply, but turned away with dimness in her own eyes. All her calmness was gone, and leaving the room, she went away alone and sobbed as though some great sorrow had come.

Next to Mabel, Ruth must be spoken to, but the second task was harder than the first. She was gifted with intellectual powers rare in one of her years, and if he had been the leader in the pleasant evenings, she was scarcely behind him. He dreaded her scorn.

He called without Mabel, a thing unusual. Lizzie Lee was there, and the two were excessively

gay. He listened, and did his best to be social for a weary half hour, and then was thankful to hear Mrs. Lee calling her daughter from the piazza at home. The summons was obeyed, and Frank dared not delay longer.

"You remember our conversation on Sunday, and that I expressed myself dissatisfied with the views I have so long and so strongly advocated?"

"Yes, Frank, and I was sorry."

"You perhaps know, too, that I have since renounced them, and that is why I was not here on Monday evening."

"I knew you had made that renunciation, and suspected the cause of your absence. We missed you. But you really will not abandon us now? Come to our gatherings as long as you stay in town."

"No, I must stay away."

"But that isn't generous of you. If you have found new truth, you ought to let us share it. Your presence now would give new life to our meetings."

"Most gladly, Ruth, would I share it with every one of you. It is more than truth, it is happiness; and to see you all partakers of its blessedness would be the greatest joy I could

have. It is a feast to which I invite *you*. I come commissioned by the Master to do it."

"No doubt you are come to the highways and hedges. But you remember one was not permitted to remain because he had not on a wedding garment. His fate would be mine, for I have no faith. However, let us drop this. We meet next time at Mrs. Lee's. Mabel will need your company."

"I hope Mabel will not go. But if she does, I cannot."

"Now, Frank, you naughty man! I will not say again that we miss you. We have had one very pleasant evening in your absence, and can have many more."

"You are not sure of the many more. All times, you remember, whether pleasant or not, will have an end, and what then?"

"Of course we all know they will end, and *who* knows what then? But you do talk so dolefully! You may stay away!"

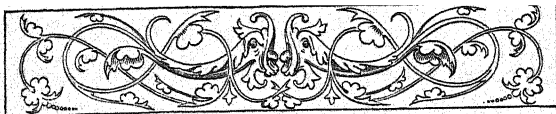
It was of no use to reason with Ruth, and the young man went away sad. He feared he had been instrumental in leading her as well as his sister astray; how much easier it was than bringing them home again! Alas! how could he do that?

Mabel went to the next meeting of the society, and to several others, not wishing to be thought dependent upon her brother for her opinions, and for a time the pleasant evenings flourished, for Ruth, who had the feeling that their success now depended upon her, exerted herself to the utmost to make them interesting and attractive. But after Frank went away to college, Mabel attended rarely; the other members failed to come regularly, and, the best minds being gone, Ruth lost her own relish for them, and when winter came, with its lectures, concerts and social gatherings, "Pleasant Evenings" ceased to be.

Frank did not speak to Ruth again on the subject of religion, nor were any of the old topics revived in their conversations, but just before going away he sent her a long letter, in which he exposed the fallacies of his old position, portrayed the reasonableness of the one he now held, and entreated her to leave the sands and build upon the Rock. She read it carefully, and said:

"Poor Frank! I gave you credit for more sense."

The letter required no answer and received none.



CHAPTER VIII.

OTHER EVENINGS.

“Lord, what am I, that with unceasing care
Thou didst seek after me, that thou didst wait,
Wet with unhealthy dews, before my gate,
And pass the gloomy nights of winter there?

“Oh strange delusion that I did not greet
Thy blest approach! and oh, to heaven how lost,
If my ingratitude's untimely frost
Has chilled the bleeding wounds upon thy feet!”

LONGFELLOW.

WINTER brought a revival of religion. Active Christians worked with renewed zeal. Believers apparently dead were quickened, and the impenitent were moved. Mabel, Ruth and Lizzie attended the meetings steadily, chiefly for the excitement afforded, and Ruth and Lizzie were not slow to criticise.

Alas! there was and always is room for criticism. Who would call us—sitting idly and

thoughtlessly here, toying with pleasures, with crosses so long since thrown aside that the grass has grown over them, or so busy gathering shining dust as to have no time to lift our eyes to the sky or to survey the road before us—who would call us pilgrims and strangers on the earth? Who would say that we were pressing “toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”—toward the “city which hath foundations”? And if sometimes, when a throng moves past, we too start up and hurry on, but in a little while sit down to pleasure again, will it be believed that we are eager to reach the country for which we have set out?

These girls discovered many calling themselves by the name of Christ whom they had not suspected of being his followers, who had never borne his yoke, and whose light, though not hidden under a bushel, had never shined before men. Shutting their eyes to the purity and faithfulness of the few, they looked on these and said: “We are safe if they are.”

But God does not forget that the soul is precious, though his children do. He still calls after us, still pours out his Spirit, and days of Pentecost continue to come. They had come to the

churches of Hopeton, and morning after morning and evening after evening, with one accord, the people flocked to the house of prayer. God seemed to be saying: "I have come especially near to you. It is a time accepted, a day of salvation. All the years have I stretched out my hands unto you. I have called, but many have not regarded. Yet once more, because I take no delight in the death of the sinner, I come inviting you to life. I know that it is hard to leave your evil ways, that the gate is strait and the way narrow and that few find it: therefore have I parted the clouds, and my light shines full upon it. I have taken the stones out of the way, that your feeble feet may not stumble and fail to reach it. 'Come, for all things are now ready.' Come unto me and find the source of all your joys, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when ye shall say, 'We have no pleasure in them.'"

How tenderly came the voice! Ruth and Mabel and Lizzie heard, but, though tossed about by winds of doctrine, hungry, ill at ease, they said: "We are satisfied. It is only a dream, a fable. We will cling to our theories."

One night, however, as they walked arm in

arm toward the church, after Ruth and Lizzie had been talking volubly of what they believed, Mabel said, trying to conceal a feeling deeper than her words expressed :

"I know you will think me weak, but I cannot stay away from all my friends and pain them longer. I mean to give myself up to the influence of the meeting to-night. I shall rise for prayers if there is an opportunity offered. If there is anything in religion, I mean to find it, for the sake of those I love, and if there is anything in it, I suppose I need it for myself."

"If you rise for prayers, you are gone," said Ruth.

Lizzie heard gladly, having wanted to do the same, but feared to recede after all she had said unless the others did the same.

The sermon was impressive. Mabel wept, and Lizzie was thoughtful. If Ruth was touched, she did not reveal it. When the opportunity was presented for those who, desiring to forsake their sins, wished the aid and prayers of God's children to express it, Mabel rose heavily from her seat, trembling so that she was obliged to lean upon the top of the pew before her for support.

Lizzie looked eagerly at Ruth. "Won't you rise? I will if you will."

At once there flashed upon the mind of Ruth the thought that but for her Lizzie would turn to the Saviour.

"I will not stand in her way," she said, mentally, "nor will prayer hurt me."

Extending her hand to Lizzie they rose together, and Ruth looked at her father. The instant he saw her on her feet his head dropped, and she knew what hope thrilled him. Absorbed in silent supplication and gratitude, he forgot that all the people were waiting for him until the silence became oppressive, when, remembering, he fell upon his knees and tried to pray, but words failed him. At length he found voice to ask,

"Brother Hope, will you lead us?"

But Brother Hope dared not trust himself. He preferred to join with some other.

"Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ," said an aged Christian, falling upon his knees and pouring forth such a petition for these dear girls as made even Ruth bow her head and weep. When he had finished, the feeling throughout the church seemed to be too deep for words, and for a little

time the congregation were engaged in silent prayer. Then a voice was lifted which few had expected to hear, and a young man pleaded earnestly but briefly for the repentant ones, and prayer followed prayer in quick succession.

When the girls were leaving the church, Frank Hope found them at the door. Cordially extending one hand to Ruth, and the other to Lizzie, he said, "I thank God for you;" and then turning to Mabel, drew her arm within his own and passed out. Yielding to a strong desire to attend some of the meetings, he had come home unexpectedly, arriving after his sister had started for the church.

Ruth felt her father's hand tremble and cling to hers when they kissed each other and parted for the night. She slept little and thought a great deal—was almost persuaded to be a Christian; but pride said, "No!" The next day she was extravagantly gay. In the course of the morning, Lizzie came in.

"What are you going to do in this matter?" she said.

Ruth answered discreetly:

"My dear girl, I cannot tell you—perhaps I do not know myself. But this is a matter which concerns each of us alone. We stand or fall for

ourselves. It is not for you to ask what I am going to do, or what Mabel or any one else is going to do, before making your decision. If you feel that you ought to be a Christian, go on, by all means. Let no one's example hinder you."

Lizzie went away more thoughtful than she came.

Mr. Hawthorne and his two daughters were sitting alone just after tea. Lily had been climbing upon her father's knees and jumping down until he was tired and required her to keep still. She climbed up again and put both arms around his neck, resting her head on his shoulder, and asked,

"Papa, where is mamma?"

"In heaven, darling."

"With wings and white quose on?"

"I cannot tell whether she has wings, but she is very happy, very beautiful there."

"Don't she 'member me and baby?"

"Yes, dear; I do not think she has forgotten any of us."

"Is she bad now?"

"No, nothing bad can ever be in heaven. That is what makes all so bright there. Mamma is better now than she was here."

"Den I know she wants to see me, and if she could she'd dwop me down a bwight pwetty little dwess, and some little wed shoes."

"They don't have such things there, my dear child."

"Dey have little gold harps, don't dey? I'd like one of dem."

"Do you want to go there to get one?"

"No, papa; but maybe she could get me one."

"What would you do with a harp?"

"Oh, I'd learn to pway just as nice!"

"There is only one way my Lily can make such music as they have in heaven, and she has the little harp now, I think. She has a heart that can love. If she gives that heart to the Saviour, and loves him and everybody about her, all her life will be music such as is made there. Perhaps we should hear it only when she spoke or sang, but we should know her heart to be in harmony with everything good. God and angels would hear it, and it would be sweeter to their ears than any sounds a real harp could give. And if mamma could give her anything out of heaven, I think it would be a loving spirit."

"Would mamma hear it too?"

"I trust so, darling, and then whatever Lily

might wear she would be more beautiful than any little dress could make her."

"Would I sing?"

"Yes, dear, for ever and for ever."

"Does Woodie make moosic and sing?"

The father paused to frame a reply.

"I hope she is beginning to do it. Now, Lily, please go and see if Aunt Jenny has got baby to sleep, and tell Mark to come to me."

Lily ran off, and the father said :

"Ruth, how is it? I may speak to you now of your highest interests, may I not?"

"I wish you would not, papa. When I am ready I will come to you."

"Will you ever be ready, dear?"

There was no answer. He was disappointed, but not without hope. Lily returned with Mark.

"Lily," said Ruth, "please go to aunty and tell her that I shall not go to church to-night, so she can go if she chooses."

"Not going!" said Mr. Hawthorne. "I wish you would, Ruth."

"I am not feeling quite well to-night, and I think it would be better to stay, if you are willing."

"Perhaps it will be better." Mr. Hawthorne

hoped that the solitude of her own thoughts would have a salutary influence.

The others being gone, Ruth spent her time telling stories to Lily until she was asleep, and then went into the library to read. When Mr. Hawthorne came back, Frank and Mabel were with him. The face of the latter was radiant with joy.

"Ruth," she said, softly, not intending the words for other ears, "rejoice with me. I have given all up. The Saviour has come into my heart. It was not for love of brother or parents that I received him, but from love to him alone. My poor philosophy has been too narrow to take in God, too narrow for myself even, and I have had to drop it and accept in its place his broad, loving will. And," she added, after a pause, "it is a sweet exchange."

Ruth had expected this, but felt herself in an awkward position, being unable to sympathize with her friend. At length she replied :

"I am glad to know that you are happy, glad you can be. Every one must be fully persuaded in his own mind."

"Oh, Ruth, do not speak so coldly ! You try to make me think that you have no desire to

learn the blessedness of living by faith on the Son of God. I know you have. I have been where you are myself, so proud that I would not yield. But I have gone beyond that now, and want to help you. Will you not go with me? There is nothing to keep you here, but everything to urge you onward."

Mabel's earnestness had reached the ears of Mr. Hawthorne and Frank, and the conversation dropped between them. Ruth perceived it, and her answer came too low for them to hear, though both waited with trembling eagerness.

"If I ever become a Christian, it must be when there is no revival. I must find the motives for such a course in the depths of my own reason and needs, not in the contagion of excitement."

Mabel threw her arms around Ruth.

"You are not excited now, you are thinking earnestly, and cannot turn your thoughts away. Another time you may not be able to think. So many other things may crowd upon you that it may be impossible to turn your attention in this direction, or reason may be gone. Life may not last."

"Then it will be just as well, I suppose."

Mabel, feeling that further words would be

vain, rose to go. Frank came and took Ruth's hand.

"Are you not persuaded to try with us a better way?"

"Not yet."

"Oh, Ruth! I am sorry;" and he turned away.

"Perhaps," she said, following them to the door, "my road will be narrower than yours, and involve more self-denial."

"A self-denial useless and bitter, bringing no joy to you or to others," said Frank.

The door closed, and they were gone. Ruth went back to her father, seated herself upon his knee and wept, but he dared not speak to her. At length their lips met in the good-night kiss, and she went to her room.

"Will my persecutions never cease?" she said aloud. "At least I might have been spared this last trial."

The inward voice was not to be thus silenced. It rebuked her willfulness. She grew angry; and there, alone in the presence of her Maker, the sweet, gentle Ruth chafed with bitterness of anger because the loving Saviour was calling: 'Come unto me.'

Could she have been happy in heaven?



CHAPTER IX.

A CHANGE.

Nothing we do for God is lost;
Nothing comes meaningless from him.

MARK was steadily gaining the mastery over himself. Even Ruth acknowledged his improvement, though he still did things which to her seemed strangely inconsistent. The revival helped him greatly; its religious atmosphere was to his virtues what warm, sunny days are to vegetation in spring; they sprang forth and clustered about him as leaves unfold and cover branches. In looking round for an answer to his question: "What wilt thou have me to do?" he found Ann and Noel, than whom none seemed to be more friendless and uncared-for, and he believed God had sent him to them.

Was he not right?

Ann was not a Romanist. A crucifix and

rosary, which she vaguely regarded as sacred, had descended to her, a sole inheritance, from parents she could scarcely remember; yet having lived chiefly among irreligious Protestants, she had been influenced little toward any faith. Here for the first time her soul was cared for, Mr. Hawthorne insisting that she should be present always at the family devotions, and wishing her to attend church. She made bitter complaints about the loss of time in the busiest part of the day, and utterly refused to go to the meetings, although a suit of suitable clothing was presented to her as an inducement. Mark, remembering that his mother had instructed her girls in things pertaining to the eternal as well as the temporal, began by telling her Bible stories and explaining them until she became a good deal interested; then he read to her, and finally succeeded in getting her to try to learn to read. But it was slow work. Ann had little patience, and he could read so much better that she depended principally upon hearing. Aunt Jenny encouraged and helped him, and one evening the ignorant Ann was persuaded to go to church; after this she went with some degree of regularity, and seemed to be proud to sit with the minister's family. But to the boy,

who watched impatiently, she exhibited no signs of a change of heart.

With Noel his success was still less. True, since he had once or twice helped him out of trouble, Noel had paid him some deference, and shown his gratitude by coming for aid when in difficulty, yet he had little liking for his friend in hours of prosperity, and no inclination to listen to him as a teacher; for such Mark really thought he was and ought to be, while Noel boasted that he knew more about the Bible and everything else than Mark Hawthorne, any day.

"Woodie! Woodie! wake up and dweess me!" shouted Lily, making her way up stairs in her night-gown, with her clothes in her arms. "Woodie! Oh, Woodie, how you do seep!" she added, coming to her sister's bed and laughing aloud at her efforts to wake herself.

"Oh, little Mischief!" said Ruth, embracing and kissing her pet as soon as she was fully awake. "What sent you here so early?"

"Noffing in de world but aunty," said the little one, demurely pulling the sleeve off her left arm.

"Why did she send you?"

"'Cause she's sick, and wants you to come wight away."

"You should have told me that first," said Ruth, springing up and dressing herself hastily.

"No's up, and I'm just goin' to fwo a snow-ball at him when I get dwessed. Won't he be sca'd and jump!" and again the child laughed merrily. "Oh, dwess me first. I can't fwo de snow-ball! do, do, do!" she exclaimed, for Ruth was going down stairs in haste.

"Hush, darling. I'll be back pretty soon if I can."

"Pwetty soon!" was the contemptuous reply of the little lady, following her with her burden.

Mrs. Jennison was helpless from rheumatism, and suffering severely. Ruth had enough to do. Lily came to the door crying.

"I cannot help you now, pet, but perhaps Ann or papa will. You must be very still this morning, you and Mark, and try to keep Channy still, for the noise makes aunty worse. Will you remiember?"

"Yes," whispered the child, going away on tip-toe to find Ann.

Ann was near at hand, but the operation of fastening her clothing was not completed, when,

catching a glimpse of Mark in the hall, Lily called with all her voice,

"Mawtie! Mawtie! Auntie's sick dis mornin', and you mustn't speak a word 'tall, 'cause it'll hurt her." Then glancing out of the window, "Oh, dere's No! now I'll fwo it;" and springing out of the door, she gathered some snow in her hands, laughing so loud as to be heard all over the house, startling Noel, and thus defeating her deep scheme. There came a second peal, when he ran to get out of her way.

"Oh, No, how 'fwaid you are!"

"Lily, come in this minute!" said Ruth, in a low voice. "You are naughty to make so much noise. You said you would be very still. See now if you can remember it until breakfast is ready."

"Yes, I will."

Ruth brought Channing to Mark and went again into Mrs. Jennison's room. Not many minutes after her disappearance, the cat was lugged in, harnessed with a string—which operation was no easy one, as the hands of the little girl abundantly testified—and then driven round the room.

"See her, Mawtie! don't she act funny?" spoke

out the driver, who had not meant to speak a loud word.

"Lily, you mustn't. You know Aunt Jenny is very sick."

"Pwob'ly she'll die and go to heaven," said the child in a measured whisper.

"Why, Lily, how you talk! If she should die, she would never come back any more, like mamma, and then who'd take care of the baby, I'd like to know?"

"I never thinked."

As soon as the morning devotions were over, Lily slipped away to Mrs. Jennison's bedside.

"Auntie," she whispered, loudly, "are you sick?"

"Dreadful sick, dear."

"I don't want you to die."

"No, dear."

"But if you make up your mind to, you'll let me know, won't you?"

"Why, Lily?"

"'Cause I want to send somesing to my mamma. And you'll take the baby with you, won't you?"

"Can you spare him?"

"I guess we could, and you know nobody

could take care of him if you wasn't here. You and mamma togedder could do it well 'nough."

"Poor little things!" said the motherly soul, deeply impressed with the belief that the world would be a bad place for those children if she were not in it.

"Who is to take care of this woman?" said the doctor, who came in soon after.

"I am," replied Ruth.

"Fudge! Who's to take care of the children?"

"We must get some one, I suppose."

"Easier said than done. I tell you there isn't anybody that I know that can fill her place. Where's your father?"

Mr. Hawthorne was called and came in with Channy, for whom he had undertaken to care in the present emergency.

"Parson," said the doctor, "what's to be done with this woman? If she isn't booked for a long siege, I don't read right; and this is no place for her. She must be taken to her home, if she has any, the first mild day."

"Doctor, we can't spare her, or turn her away in her time of trouble."

"I know, but that isn't the thing. You'll find out pretty soon that you're in trouble yourself.

She must be where she can be quiet, and it isn't in nature for such busy little fellows as yours to behave like old folks. They're children, and must be children. If I'm going to doctor her, I want her taken away. There's no objection to your showing your gratitude when she's gone, though. She'll have to live, and so will that girl of hers."

Hannah came that day, and the next week Mrs. Jennison was taken home, going with everything the Hawthorne family could furnish for her comfort, but leaving Ruth and her father still concerned as to how the two would live. It would require Hannah's constant presence, but not all of her time, to take care of her mother, and as she could use a sewing machine it was suggested that if she had one, her work might almost, if not quite, support them. Ruth volunteered to attempt to raise the money for one among her friends. But she was busy, and before she could get away her father had easily raised considerably more than the required sum among the members of his church, to whom he had need only to state the case and they were ready to give. He went with Ruth to acquaint the poor woman with this provision for her necessities.

"I knew something would come," said Mrs. Jennison, "but I didn't expect it so soon. God and his children are so good they won't even let me be anxious. What am I that he should indulge me so?"

Her little room was not far from the parsonage, and Ruth allowed no day to pass in which some of the family did not visit the invalid, and whenever it was practicable she went herself.

While Mrs. Jennison was with them Ruth had been greatly burdened with care, but now it was doubled. In spite of the efforts put forth to find a suitable nurse she had all the time either to take the entire charge of the children, or to teach a novice her duties, or to be annoyed by the thought that she was leaving them to an untrustworthy person. Her studies had to be given up, greatly against her father's wishes, and the piano was silent. Channing was teething and exceedingly fretful. He grew thin and pale, and the coming of the physician availed little while there was no one of greater experience than his sister to care for him. But she neither complained nor gave signs of fatigue; she had good health, and was too loving and brave and proud for that.

She could hardly have done without Mark, who

helped her everywhere. When Ann was dissatisfied and rebellious, he was the meditator between them, as Mrs. Jennison had used to be; he would give up his sports out of doors cheerfully, though sometimes it cost him a struggle, to help his sister; he would watch little Channing for hours when he was so peevish as to test the patience even of a mother. Then Ruth called him the best of brothers, which was indeed a reward, giving him courage to think that, in spite of all his faults, his light was shining.

Ruth seemed to him a superior being, whom he could not hope to lead to Christ; that honor must be for some one older and wiser. He blushed when she found him reading the Bible to Ann or teaching it to Lily, not because of shame, but for fear of her criticisms. It was not for him to know that in his life, notwithstanding all his boyishness, she saw an image of the Saviour that was to her the most nearly divine, and which she could not but admire and reverence. His earnest efforts to do right were doing more for her than all his words could do for Noel.

Ruth was sitting with Lilian by the window in the twilight. The little girl had been asking for a story, but as her sister could recall none which

she wished to repeat, she directed her attention to the bare branches standing up between them and the sky.

"I'll tell you about the fairy that lives in the trees. There is one lying asleep in every little seed, and when the seed is planted in a good place, the fairy wakes and goes to work very industriously, first sending some tiny leaves up and little roots down."

"What's the fairy's name?"

"Life. Through the tiny leaves the clear air which we cannot see goes in, and the fairy's wonderful fingers, aided by the beams of light, take it to pieces and put one part in one place, and another part in another place, where they are most needed. Up through the roots, as though they were little pumps, she draws water holding other substances from the dark ground, and divides these also, making all the time little cells so tiny that Lily's eyes could not see them without the aid of a glass. No one ever hears her at work, but she is there, and putting new cells on and in, builds all the tree—the hard wood of the great stem, the rough bark, the branches and boughs, the little twigs and buds and leaves, the beautiful flowers and the fruit which we some-

times eat. Don't you think life a very wonderful and good little fairy?"

"I thought 'twas God did all dat. Is it, Woodie?"

"God made the fairy, I suppose."

"You don't know 'bout all dat papa and Mawtie do, do you?"

"What do you mean?"

"About the gweat white fwone, and the bootiful heaven, and Jesus."

"Of course I do, dear, just as much as they."

"Why don't you tell me 'bout 'em den?"

Ruth did not like to say that she had no love for such things, and it annoyed her that Lily should so frequently remind her of her want of love.

"Do y^a like to hear of such things better than about fairies?"

"I like 'em bof; do you? Do you like God?"

Ruth was silent. She could not tell the sad truth to such a little child.

"Speak, Woodie. I know all 'bout it myself. You like fowies; papa and Mawtie and aunty like Jesus, and Lily likes 'em all. I wish you would tell another story, Woodie."



CHAPTER X.

A COVENANT.

Choose you this day whom ye will serve.

IN April came another communion-day, when Mabel Hope, Angie Mead and many others made a public profession of faith in Christ. Mabel had fondly hoped to be accompanied by Ruth and Lizzie, but they had disappointed her. Most earnestly had she pleaded with the latter, who seemed not far from the kingdom of heaven, but at last this reply had come:

"When Ruth Hawthorne becomes a Christian I will. If she, with her superior mind and religious knowledge, in the midst of such influences as have surrounded all her life, can afford to neglect it, I can."

Vainly had Mabel urged that Ruth could not afford it, that except we be born again we cannot see the kingdom of God; and that now is the

accepted time. The answer was invariably—*Ruth.*

Mabel still loved Ruth and saw her as frequently as before, but since that fairest of all evenings when, with her own soul filled with new light, she sought to lead her friend to open the windows of her heart and let the sun shine in, there had been something between them that she longed to tear away. With regard to the great aim of life they could no longer sympathize, and on one point there must be silence between them. Because she could not speak when that reply had come from Lizzie, Mabel wrote to Ruth, disclosing all, and asking if she dared thus to stand in another's way. The answer was characteristic:

"I am grieved to think that Lizzie acts the part she does. I have warned her of the folly—no, of the impossibility—of placing her decision in the hands of another. If she does not choose to heed my words, she cannot blame me. I am not in her way save as she has placed me there. I have nothing to do with it. No good can possibly come from playing the hypocrite. Had I been willing to do this, I should long ago have become a *professed* Christian, even though not one

at heart, to please my father, but I cannot perjure myself."

So Mabel had given up all but prayer. Standing before the altar, she felt lonely because her friends were not with her. It was with trembling she made the solemn covenant summed up in the engagement "to live as an humble Christian, consecrated in soul and body, property and influence, to the service of her Lord and Redeemer, until removed by death." So many had made the same vow and had not performed it. True, it was in humble dependence on the grace of God that she made the promise, but what if she should forget to seek that grace, to abide in him? There was also a promise made to her that she should be treated with Christian affection, watched over with tenderness, and that prayer should be offered to the great Head of the Church to enable her to fulfill the solemn covenant she had made.

How many of those who made this engagement felt personally bound to keep it? How many were there who did not vaguely think it was "the Church" that was to do this and not he or she, the individual member of it?

Then she was commended to "Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us

faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour."

Here was her comfort! He was able, and was he not willing too? Had she not the assurance that she should never perish, and that none should pluck her out of his hand? And, to make it stronger still, none was able to take her out of the Father's hand. She would indeed be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Not of herself, not of the Church, was she saved, but "through Him who has loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood."

No longer were her vows a weight to Mabel. They were holy pleasures. She was to be a co-worker with Christ, as well as heir to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away.

Oh, poor, weary, self-deluded, dissatisfied Ruth, striving against the best Friend and missing happiness like this!

Frank was present, and Ruth walked home with them as usual. There was little said. Only one glance into Mabel's face was needed to gain the assurance that she was blessed beyond the power of words to express. When they had come into the house the brother said:

"You are beautiful to-day, Mabel. I am glad for you, and only wish Ruth and Lizzie could have been with you."

"Yes, Frank, I am sorry for them, but even that feeling cannot destroy my happiness to-day."





CHAPTER XI.

MABEL'S CLASS.

MABEL was ready for work, and the next Sabbath after her union with the church took a class of boys in the Sabbath-school. Not from choice, however, for she had not profited by the instructions of the Bible class, of which she and Ruth had so long been members, and now felt that she needed to remain there.

Her pupils welcomed her warmly, and Noel Brainard, who had left the class Mark was in and joined the one of smaller boys now assigned to her, was especially pleased with her coming. The others did not like to sit by him, so he sat with the teacher. Mabel was greatly annoyed by his constantly leaning against her, and feeling it a duty to comment upon all that was said. She heard him kindly and patiently at first, but seeing that it was unprofitable, and that he never

tired of talking, thought to silence him with a pleasant lesson.

"Noel, there are six in this class besides myself."

"That makes seven," said Noel, promptly.

"And we six ought to have the privilege of talking how many times as long as you?"

"Twice."

"That makes him one-third of the class," said Charley May.

"No, one-half of it," said Samuel Dewy.

Mabel had not expected this turn nor intended to go into a lesson in mathematics, but thought it would be quite as well to go on.

"Who was right, Samuel or Charley?" she asked of the remaining three.

One said Charley and another said Sam, while the third did not feel sure. She left them to find out, and, turning again to Noel, said,

"Have you ever studied fractions?"

"Yes, I have. I've been clear over to interest, but I can't make nobody believe it;" and he was about to go on with a history of his wrongs at school, but she stopped him.

"Noel, one is what part of seven?"

"One-tenth."

The other boys came near laughing aloud, but she checked them, and then put the same question to them.

"One-seventh," they replied unanimously.

"And there are six-sevenths remaining. Noel, if all the rest of us were to talk six times as much as you do, should we get through very soon?"

"I guess it would take till night."

"I think so. So let each one remember not to occupy more than his share of the time, but to let all have an opportunity to speak."

"You too?" said Noel.

Mabel smiled, but went on with the lesson.

When the school had closed, following her pupils out, she discovered one and then another of them touching Noel with the first finger and whispering something in his ear which seemed to irritate him greatly.

"I a'n't neither. I've got as many as you have," she heard him say, when he turned back, looking up appealingly to her.

Mark Hawthorne was near and knew very well what they were saying, for more than once he had heard the air around the school-house ringing with the cry of "No-brains," sent up by many voices, and as many times had succeeded in silen-

cing that cry. Now the guilty ones looked at him and were ashamed.

"Noel, will you go home with me?" he asked.

"No, I'm going home with Mabel."

"Then I'll go with Ruth," said Mark, walking on with his sister.

"Why don't she have a class?" asked Noel, pointing to Ruth. "She's the minister's girl."

"She has enough to do without."

"Well, I'm glad she has, for I don't want her to have our class. I don't like her as well as I do you."

Mabel almost wished that Ruth had her place, believing that the boys would be more orderly under her charge.

The next Sunday, Noel had quite forgotten his lesson in fractions, and his teacher, wisely refraining from giving him another at that time, had difficulty in keeping him in his place. He came still closer and put his arm around her neck. She gently disengaged it, but it was soon back again, the curls were brushing her cheek, and the pleasant eyes looking intently into her face.

"Sit down, Noel, please," she said, retaining the plump hand in her own. He kept his seat during the remainder of the session, and she took

courage. It was possible that the boy's better nature might be reached.

But who had the skill and patience to find it? Who loved him enough?

May came, but May with us is not summer. The air was cold, and Mabel, who had been at work in her flower-garden, came shivering to the stove.

"You must be more careful of your health," said Mrs. Hope. "I hear there is a good deal of sickness about."

The door-bell rang hurriedly. Mabel stopped to take off a soiled apron and adjust her collar before answering the summons. Again it rang furiously.

"That sounds like distress," she said, hastening to the door, where stood Noel.

"Come over to our house right off! Lizzie is awful sick."

"Did they send you to tell me?"

"No, but she wants to see you; I heard 'em say so. Come *now*."

"Yes, dear."

Preparing herself hurriedly, she accompanied him.

"How long has Lizzie been sick?"

"Oh, ever so long! most a week, or two days."

"Does she sit up?"

"Sit up! I guess she don't! She's crazy!"

"Are you sure, Noel? I am afraid you are playing some trick upon me. Is it really so?"

"Do you think, Mabel Hope, that I go to Sunday-school and tell lies too?"

Mabel found Lizzie upon her bed and looking sick indeed, but the boy's excited imagination had magnified every particular. She had not been well for several days, but had been about the house until the evening before, and the mother and sister, though full of sympathy, were not apprehensive of danger. Ruth had come in for a few minutes, not knowing that her friend was really ill. The physician, who had been called that morning for the first time, arrived while they were there.

"It is well you sent for me," he said, "for after a little longer waiting she could not have been saved from a severe illness. Now, I hope there will be no trouble, but she must be watched closely."

"Can't one of you come and sit with me a while this afternoon?" Lizzie said, extending her hands to her two friends as they were about to go

home. "It's so lonely, and I think I am a little gloomy."

"I wish I could," said Ruth, "but the little world on my shoulders presses with unusual heaviness to-day. This evening, or to-morrow, I might come."

"Then you shall depend upon me," Mabel said, glad that the lot had fallen to her.

She accompanied Ruth to the parsonage gate, and on turning to go home, found Noel at Mrs. Lee's gate, ready to walk with her.

"My dear little boy, how could you tell me that Lizzie was so sick, and even delirious?"

"Do you mean crazy? 'Cause she was," said Noel, positively.

"Oh, be careful! perhaps you thought so, but you might do a great deal of mischief telling things in that way."

"Well, now you hear. This morning when there wa'n't nobody else around I heard her talkin' low, so I just peeked in, and there she was talkin' to Ruth with her eyes shet jest as tight, and Ruth wasn't there at all; she was at home—I saw her through the window—and if that a'n't crazy, what is, I'd like to know?"

"She must have been talking to herself."

"She! Lizzie Lee! talkin' to herself! Humph! she don't do that."

Mabel smiled, but, making no reply, her silence gave the boy an opportunity to go on talking, and such an opportunity he never failed to improve.

"I can tell you what she said, too. She said 'Oh, Ruth! Ruth! why did I listen to your actings instead of your words? but I did, and now, if—if—if—' and then she stopped and shet her eyes tighter. A'n't that crazy, I'd like to know? She don't talk like that every day."

"Was that all she said, Noel?"

"All I 'member, and that's true, too."

The boy prattled on, but Mabel heard no more, being too busy thinking of the meaning of Lizzie's soliloquy. If she guessed it rightly, what could she do? It made her anxious, and soon after dinner she hurried back, finding Lizzie much worse than she had appeared to be in the morning.

"I am so glad, so glad you have come!" she said. "I am afraid I am going to be very sick in spite of all the doctor can do, and if I should it would be bad."

Mabel thought she referred to her want of preparation for death, but wished the explanation to

be voluntary, and giving her full opportunity to speak, tried to cheer and soothe her. For a time the effort was successful, but the pain in the head continued.

"You have talked too much," said Mabel, bathing the forehead of the sick girl. "If you will shut those eyes"—they had been gazing earnestly into her face—"perhaps you can sleep; my silence shall give you the opportunity."

"You won't go away?"

"No, you shall have me as long as I can be of use."

"You are so good!" and tears stole from under eyelids that had tried to keep them hidden. "There is something I want to ask you. I've been told a great many times how to become a Christian, but now I can't remember. Tell me again."

Then Mabel gladly and with few words pointed her to Jesus, the only Mediator, who promised that he will in nowise cast out any that come to him. Lizzie listened eagerly, but said no more, and though Mabel and Ruth went many times to see her they never heard her speak intelligently again, nor could she listen to the pleadings of the Saviour repeated by human tongues. In a few

days the voice was hushed for ever, and it was never known whether she had found him.

The two friends stood together, Mabel holding Ruth's cold hand, while they gazed upon the dead, beautiful in the stillness of its stony repose, yet how unlike the same body when in health the soul animated it! How faded and sunken the face! Truly, it was sown in dishonor. "How," thought Mabel, "will it be raised?" There came the anguish of uncertainty.

There must be suffering that rends the heart and causes the head to droop when our friends go from us even to a better country, and under convoy of Him who said: "I will come again and receive you unto myself;" when we know that they have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. But when we doubt whither they have wandered, when we fear that pain fiercer than that which we feel, and which time can never still, has come to them, how can we bear it?

Lizzie, the beautiful, the loved, the cherished, but a few weeks before had seen the Saviour so near that a little trusting whisper would have brought him close and made him her everlasting Friend; but now in the dark hour she had for-

gotten where to find him. Perhaps in the darkness he met her and said: "Thou hast rebelled against me all the days of thy life, but I have paid the price of thy ransom. Thou wast dear to me, and though thou hast sought me late I have saved thee." Perhaps she missed him for ever!

Ruth and Mabel felt the loss most keenly. Ruth sobbed over the poor clay and refused to be comforted. There were bitter remembrances and smitings of conscience to add to her grief, which she kept close within her own soul. Nothing which could add to the beauty of the marble form was too much for her to do. But when the dear form, in its beautiful garments, was hidden away in the earth, she ceased altogether to speak of her.

But Mabel loved to talk of sweet Lizzie, found pleasant things to tell of her for years afterward, and fondly persuaded herself that the Saviour found her a repentant soul, and did for her what in his own death he did for the crucified thief, bearing her away to paradise.

While the two stood together gazing upon the dead, Noel came, with his eyes filled with tears.

"Mabel, she was crazy and awful sick, and you thought she wasn't. I knew it first of anybody."

"Yes, Noel," she said, and disengaging her hand from Ruth's, she took the child aside. "Be very still, for death is here. Death shuts up the eyes so that they cannot see; the ears never hear any more, and the hands cannot feel. When death comes we stop talking and breathing, and grow white and still and cold like stone. And, little Noel, death will come and take you away some time. Maybe it will wait till these plump hands belong to an old man, and tremble and are wrinkled, and these soft curls are white and stiff, or have fallen out. Or, it may be it will come when he is a man so full of life and work that he is not looking for it and has no time to stop. Yet he will drop everything and lie still. Or it may come when these hands are small and plump as they are now, while his eyes are bright and laughing and his hair curls so prettily. Does Noel know what comes after death? Is he ready to die?"

If Noel had not been deeply touched, he would have made some reply. As it was, he only snuffed up the tears and drew his sleeve across his eyes. Mabel went on:

"What did Jesus do for Noel? He saw, in his bright home, that he would be a sinful boy,

that he would have wicked thoughts and would love bad things. He knew that such a boy could not be happy, even in heaven. But Jesus loved Noel so that he came down into the world to be a little boy, and grew up to be a man that he might show him and all other children how to grow up, and what kind of men they ought to be. And as if that wasn't enough, he even died to atone for his sins to take them away.

"Does Noel love Jesus? He ought to love the One who has done so much for him. When he loves him he will love everything that is good and hate everything that is bad, and that will be a new heart. Then he will not think so much of having his own way, but will mind what is said by his parents and teachers; he will try to please Mrs. Walton, to be polite and respectful to all who are older than he, and gentle to all little boys and girls. Will he ask Jesus to give him a new heart?"

Noel slipped away and went out of the room, still rubbing his sleeve across his face, and afterward showed Mabel that he remembered her lesson, by now and then sending her a picture of a gravestone, rude, but the best he could make, with his name and age inscribed thereon.



CHAPTER XII.

THE SPIRIT RESISTED.

AGAIN the trees had shaken off their fragrant snow of blossoms; the sun came up to its northern gate; the clear atmosphere opened vistas for the eye off into infinite spaces; the forests wore their greenest robes; flowers smiled everywhere; orioles, hanging out new cradles for the winds to rock, flamed in the trees, and sweetened the air with song; bobolinks tinkled out their happinesses in inimitable strains, for the "gladness of woods, skies, waters all in one" had come with June.

Ruth, so fresh one year before, was now comparatively pale, and worn with work and constant care. The winter had been one continued conflict between her own strong will and her own necessities; the year had been a year's journey toward womanhood; a succession of failures, reveal-

ing something of her own insufficiency and adding to that restlessness which the soul must feel until it finds rest in God. But in her pride she would recognize neither the demands of her nature nor the right of the All-loving to be loved with the whole heart.

She had triumphed over the inward monitor for a little time when the death of Lizzie came to frighten her. If her friend had died impenitent, was she not in some measure responsible? But why ask the question? Did not her philosophy make impenitence a higher state than grace? She reasoned that all was right, and yet knew better; hence her wretchedness.

It was not easy to bring this conflict to an end. In the evening of a day when it had been raging with unusual force she went out, thinking to flee from her own thoughts. She paused at the gate to determine in what direction to go. Not to Mabel, who had little sympathy with the state of mind she wished to bring about. Not to Mrs. Lee's, for there the face of the dead would haunt her. Surely not to carry fresh flowers to Lizzie's grave. Not to visit Angie Mead, who had forfeited her respect by assuming the form of godliness while none of its fruits were visible. Not

to visit any of her gay friends, for the sympathy she wanted they seemed too heartless to give. Not down the river, for there God was speaking.

“Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.”

She turned toward Mrs. Jennison's.

How neat and cheerful was the room! It seemed a little paradise in spite of the poverty and pain that were continual dwellers there. The daughter was reading, but laid down her book when Ruth entered. The dear old woman, who could not reach out her stiff, swollen hands, welcomed her with eyes brightening with pleasure, and returned her kiss even more warmly than it was given.

"How do you do, darling? How do they all do at the parsonage—the little ones?"

"The little ones, aunty, are just as sweet, and noisy, and provoking as ever. You know how Lily and Channy are growing. But we are tired, especially this oldest child. Will you never come back to us?"

"No, I can't never go there again. His will is that I should sit still and suffer and—"

"Oh, cruel will! and there is no appeal!"

"Stop, child! take that back! You didn't hear me through. I was going to say, that it was his will that I should sit still and suffer and be happy, yes, *be* happy. Are you a-running about yit looking for rest where 'ta'n't to be found? because if you git it at all, it must be right under a yoke. Can't you believe what He says, that the yoke is easy and the burden is light?"

"Oh," said Ruth, "I am come to the wrong place after all. It is the old story. Don't you know that I don't believe in such things?" she added in a petulant tone.

"Don't believe in 'em! What in the world does the child mean? Just as hungry as a poor starving creetur can be, with bread a plenty be-

fore you, but ye won't take it 'cause you don't believe in bread nor eating! All tired out a-running hither and yon to git away from danger, and here's stout arms ready to take you up like a mother and hug you in away from all hurt; but you won't be took care of, 'cause something don't suit you, and you're spunky. Poor little silly thing! You're littler than I thought you was!"

Ruth laid her head on the bed and sobbed, half in shame, half in anger.

"That's right, cry away," Mrs. Jennison continued. "His loving head is close down by yours now. Just whisper in his ear while you lie there and tell him you're ashamed of it all, that you ha'n't got nothing to be proud of, that you a'n't no more than a baby, and you want him to take care of ye."

Ruth could not be offended. Dear, unsophisticated Aunt Jenny could say what she chose, and now her listener knew that her words were true, but she was not ready to yield. 'It was too low for Ruth Hawthorne to go. She would look the matter over again, and cling to reason. When the intensity of feeling and the tears were spent, she rose, washed her eyes, and bade her friend good-

night, congratulating herself that it was so dark that no one could see that she had been weeping.

Her father stood in the door awaiting her coming anxiously.

"Out alone so late, Ruth! Where have you been?"

"Only to aunty's."

"I am glad of that. I was on the point of going to look for you."

"Give me credit for a little sense, do, papa," she said, giving him a kiss.

He returned it, and held her hand somewhat hesitatingly for a moment.

"If you are not too busy, dear, when you have looked around the house and in at the children, please come to the study. I want to have a long talk with you."

What could it be about? Was it the old subject which had haunted her life? No, for he was considerate enough to be silent since she had requested it. Perhaps Ann had been having another of her tantrums, and her father was meditating a revolution in the household. Possibly she herself had unwittingly done something wrong. So curious and eager was she that her accustomed rounds were finished much sooner

than usual, and taking up her crochet work she hastened in, seating herself in a chair not far from her father. Mr. Hawthorne pushed his papers aside nervously. Evidently he had not been writing.

"Ruth, sit nearer to me. It is a matter that deeply concerns us both, and I want to feel that I have your sympathy. But there are traces of tears on your cheeks, my dear. What is the trouble to-night?"

"Nothing, only I was a little tired and nervous, and a good cry sometimes helps me amazingly in such cases."

"I see that you get very tired, though you are brave enough to conceal it as far as possible. You are every day overworked, and it pains me exceedingly. Sometimes I have blamed myself, but I have not been able to discover any way to relieve you. Are you really sick?"

"Not sick at all, my dear father, nor very tired. You know it is sometimes almost impossible to avoid low spirits, and to-night I have foolishly yielded to my mood. But in general I am very happy."

"I know that where there is brightness you find it, and I thank God that you can, but so

much care is telling upon your health and vivacity. You are losing time in your studies, which it will be very difficult to make up, and these are some of my reasons for doing what I am now to mention.

"I think, Ruth, if I can gain your consent and hers, of bringing home, by and by, a lady who will take your mother's place as far as possible, and relieve you of care—a wife."

"Oh, father!"

"I know it will seem hard to you at first thought, but if you will not allow yourself to be prejudiced because of the relationship she will assume, in a little while you will love her. She is much like your mother; they were friends. Your mother often spoke to me of her, but we never met until since her death."

Mr. Hawthorne paused, hoping his daughter would speak, but she remained silent, and he went on:

"I suppose it will not be possible for you and Mark to feel toward her, at first at least, as you would toward your own mother, but Lilian and Channing may. To them, if she prove what I am confident she will, she will be truly a mother, and to you also if you will let her. You need a

mother now, Ruth, as much as ever, and your father finds every day that he cannot be one to you.

"You think, perhaps, that I am indifferent to the memory of her we buried two years ago. You, my child, never knew her as I did. You were too young. If it is impossible for *you* to forget her, it is still more so for me. But love cannot bring her back."

Mr. Hawthorne was in tears.

"You have no idea how lonely I have been, how hard I have found it to be reconciled to this dispensation from the hand of Him who does all things in wisdom and kindness; and I long thought I could never take another wife. But seeing you all need so much the care of a judicious, loving woman, which it is in my power to supply in no other way, it has come to be a duty I owe to you, and I have seemed to hear the voice of that dear angel I love most saying to me out of heaven, 'You will remember me best by caring best for my children.' And when I became acquainted with this woman, so like her, and who was so loved by her, I felt that I would gladly take her to my heart and home. Shall I ask her to come, dear?"

Ruth felt little sympathy with her father's words, yet, seeing him weep, could not restrain her tears. She had no answer to give to his question, and was silent.

"Shall I ask her to come, Ruth?"

"That is for you to say, not me."

"But would you receive her kindly and try to make her happy? I could not bring her here if I thought it would make her life bitter. *Would* you try to make it pleasant for her?"

"Am I unpleasant to live with? Am I quarrelsome?"

"No, Ruth, I am glad to be able to say that you are a lady at home as well as abroad. But she would need from you something more than politeness."

"I cannot promise to love a step-mother. I should do my best, yet I have no hope that I should succeed."

"Thank you, darling. Your best is very excellent—you need more hope, however. I shall ask her to come, for I am confident that you will succeed, and it will be for the good of us all."

There was a long silence; at length the daughter spoke:

"Is that all you wished to say?"

"Perhaps it is enough for this evening."

"Then I will kiss you good-night."

Mr. Hawthorne held the door open and listened to her footsteps until she had reached her own room. He was afraid he did not fully understand her. Then he questioned whether it would not be better to dismiss the matter altogether. But was she not also one of his motherless ones, and fast going out of his reach? Perhaps a woman's tact might follow after and save her from the dangers of which she was so ignorant.

Ruth sat by her table until it was very late thinking of what was to come. She dared not oppose her father, but, being displeased with the prospect, studied how she could defeat his plans. Nothing was suggested but what was beneath her. She would not destroy her own self-respect. With shame she remembered the threat, so vauntingly made, that he should never bring a woman there to be called mother, for now there was nothing she could do to prevent it. Yet she would take the revenge and never call her by that sacred name.

Ruth caught a glimpse of her face in the mirror, and was startled to see how she had changed in a few months. Proud and jealous of her

beauty, scarcely anything troubled her more than hints of its departure. She was surely too young to fade.

"Ruth Hawthorne," she said, addressing the image of herself in the glass, "how weak and childish you are becoming! Where is your old courage? Carry out your determination if you can, but do not let a failure fret you. Let your brow be unclouded and your voice not lose its music.

"So if I am to have a step-mother, I will not mind it, but avail myself of all the privileges her presence gives. I can then take my ease and preserve my youth and beauty. But if she comes, I am afraid she will be sorry for it."

The next morning Mr. Hawthorne went away, ostensibly to attend a meeting of clergymen. He was to be gone three or four days or a week, perhaps.

"You expect to see brother McMin, I suppose?" said Ruth, laughing.

Mr. Hawthorne was startled by the name, and turned red, then smiled gravely, but the smile left a shade of trouble in his face.

"He will be there probably."

"And exceedingly happy to see his old friend ;

perhaps will invite him to occupy his pulpit of a Sabbath."

"When he has one;" and Mr. Hawthorne made haste to go.

"My dignified father blushing like a girl! And at what?" Ruth said, half amused and half in scorn, when he was gone. "I wonder who that woman is. He is going to see her. Happy man! to have so fine a pretext to cover his visit."

Mr. Hawthorne returned at the appointed time, but weeks passed before Ruth heard more of his plans, which evidently he would have been glad to lay before her, but choosing to appear uninterested, she gave him no opportunity.





CHAPTER XIII.

RUTH AT HOME.

WHILE the days had been growing shorter, so that now they were only equal in length to the nights, Ruth had been growing back to herself. Conscience was asleep again. A nurse had been found at last to relieve her of the children, and dear as they were she was quite disposed to give herself little anxiety in regard to them. Carrying out the policy she had marked out for herself, she grew quite as gay as seemed to be wise, considering her position as pastor's daughter and mistress of the parsonage—more so than some of the older members of her father's congregation approved. She took the least possible interest in the household affairs, because another mistress was coming who would doubtless revolutionize all things. She resumed her studies, devoted herself to the culture of her intellectual

faculties, the adornment of her person and to society. Ann was far more peaceable than formerly, because she had her own way, and all things seemed to move on smoothly.

Mark missed his sister. Arithmetic vexed him beyond his patience. It was too hard for anybody, he thought, and Ruth ought to stay at home and help him once in a while. He was not allowed to be out in the evening at all, but she was seldom in. His father was away a great deal in those days, why, it was beyond his power to guess. The younger children were usually asleep, and he had to sit alone and study. When men came in they sat in the study and talked, but nobody thought of his wanting to hear what was said. If Ruth had visitors, they went into the parlor and shut the doors and had a merry time, as he knew by the sounds that reached him, but never thought of inviting a boy only thirteen to join them. So the poor fellow was alone at home.

"What's up to-night, Ruth? Where are you going?" he asked one evening, seeing her preparing to go out.

"To choir meeting, of course. You know I always go."

"Yes, I do know that like a book, and a good deal better too. It seems to me that your choir ought to sing a precious sight better than it does if meetings do any good. I'll be a singer when I get old enough if I can't even go up and down the scale. Then won't I go? Won't catch me staying at home much. The choir'll meet every night, just as it does now."

"How you talk, Mark!"

"What have I said that's bad, I'd like to know? You'd speak occasionally if you had to stay here alone every night."

"You do not stay alone, Mark, and why do you say so?"

"How much does it lack of it? It's just the same. The children asleep, you and papa having company or away, nobody to talk to but these Irish girls. If that isn't what you'd call alone, I'd like to know what is. I tell you, Ruth, if you'll stay at home some evening and have a good old-fashioned visit with me, I'll treat you with the greatest possible politeness. I'll celebrate the occasion with peanuts and candy, true as I live."

"Well, Mark, I will to-morrow night, perhaps."

"Yes, perhaps. That saves a fib."

The young lady received an invitation for the next evening, but declined it, because she did not care particularly to go, and wished to please her brother. So the evening found her quietly seated at work. Lily came in and gave a cry of delight.

"Oh, Woodie! Here, Channy! Come, Channy, and see Woodie;" and she pulled the little fellow along to his sister.

"Dear little brother!" said Ruth, taking him in her lap; "he grows prettier every day."

"You'll get 'quainted wid her now, won't you, Channy?"

"Don't you think he knows me, Lily?"

"He hasn't seen you much this good while, and he's too little to 'member."

Mark came in and held up both hands in amazement.

"My dear, big sister!"

Then hastily taking his hat, he went out of the door, meeting his father in the hall.

"Please give me twenty-five cents or more?"

"What for?"

"To get peanuts and so-forth. You see I promised Ruth if she'd stay at home one evening I'd treat her, and, pa, she's doing it."

Pleased with the boy's eagerness and the news communicated, the father gave liberally.

"Oh, isn't it grand! This'll buy lots of things, and we'll have one jubilee all by ourselves."

Mr. Hawthorne went into the sitting-room, where Ruth was with the children.

"Ruth, I am very glad that you will favor us with your presence to-night. Please do not go away until I return, which will be very soon. I want to enjoy part of this visit myself."

"What an ado!" said Ruth, laughing. "One would think me some distinguished stranger to hear you talk."

"We'd much rather have our Ruth than the most distinguished stranger, wouldn't we, Lily?" said the father, lifting up the little girl to kiss her.

"Yes, papa. And don't Channy like it? Oh, see him!"

The little fellow was jumping up and down, giggling gleefully.

"We needn't go to bed to-night, need we, papa?"

"Not at all?"

"Oh, not till ever so late."

"You may sit up a while."

"Bid, long while?"

"Till you are sleepy enough to want to go to bed."

"Oh, good, good, good!" and the child danced about the room as though the greatest happiness in the world had come to her.

Mr. Hawthorne went out, and soon Mark came in with his hands full of packages. More lamps were lighted, and the room that had seemed so gloomy to the boy was cheerful almost beyond recognition. The evening was one full of pleasure to all. Home in its best sense was found and its sweetest joys tasted.

"How glad I am that nobody has come this evening!" said Ruth, at its close.

"Yes," Mr. Hawthorne replied, "we may well be thankful for a little time alone, and thankful that our home is so pleasant, and that there is so much love between us."

Channing was already sleeping sweetly in his bed, and when the rest had knelt in prayer, Lilian was taken away, and Mark soon went of his own accord. Then Mr. Hawthorne and Ruth went to the study that they might talk unheard. He had much to say to her, and her happiness that

evening gave him confidence to speak. Desiring her to look at a picture, he said :

"You of course understand that it is the lady of whom I told you some time ago. It does not flatter her."

Ruth saw a pleasant, intelligent face, wherein she could find no resemblance to her mother.

"She will come in October," Mr. Hawthorne said, without waiting for any expression concerning the picture, and went on to give his plans for certain changes in the house which had been in contemplation before her mother's death. These being discussed, he said :

"Ruth, have you no curiosity? Why have you never asked her name?"

"I supposed it would make no difference to me since she is an entire stranger. But I would like to know her name. Of course I know where she lives."

"I think you do, and she is Miss Anna McMinn."

Ruth started, asking such questions with her eyes as her lips dared not utter.

"Yes," was the reply, "she is his sister, but only like him in having the same complexion. She is in every way greatly his superior, and

treats him with tender pity. It is her misfortune to have such a brother. She is thoroughly educated, in all respects a lady, and I am more and more convinced that if you will dismiss all prejudice she will speedily win your love."

After a pause, in which the father seemed to be searching his brain for any further information which would be of interest, he added:

"She is about the age of your mother when she died—a little younger. I shall tell Mark before long. I have no fears with regard to him, but think he will be glad. You can do me a great favor, however, by using your influence with the younger children in her behalf."

When Ruth was alone she said aloud,

"Miss McMinn!—a sister of that man! Yet I am not to be prejudiced against her! The Reverend Samuel Hawthorne is insane."

The next morning she went to Mrs. Jennison and found her alone.

"Aunty, my father is going to be married. What shall I do?"

"Do? why stay to home, as you ought to, like the good girl you are. You wouldn't go to making any trouble, would ye?"

"Of course I shall not, but I cannot bear the

thought of it; it will break my heart. Do give me some sympathy and say you are sorry."

"How can I when I am glad? He'll look out for a good woman, and what a blessing she'll be to ye!—somebody that'll stay there and feel a mother's care for you all and not be running off every now and then."

"But I can never call her mother—I can't, aunty!"

"Why, yes, you can if you try. Now, Ruth, I want to speak to you just like a friend. You know you've thought you had a great deal too much care, and you know you need a mother; but when one is coming you won't give her the respect that belongs to your father's wife, 'cause, as you think, you remember so much your own dear one that's gone up into the sky.

"But that isn't it—you're bound not to like a stepmother. Some stepmothers is as good as own mothers, and it's wicked for children to be ugly to 'em. It isn't love that makes ye say that; ye're stubborn. Love to yer own mother'd make ye do right, and ye know what is right and pleasant better'n most young women. I always said Ruth was the pleasantest girl I ever lived with. Now, you be jest as kind and tender

as you can, and she'll love you and be your best friend. And my Ruth's going to do that, I know. I 'spect it's a trial, one of the things that it's hard to be reconciled to, but God sends 'em—they're part of our light afflictions. We can make 'em sunlight if we try, and they last only for a moment."





CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW MOTHER.

NONE of October's balmy, golden days had cooled down to a silver evening, the full moon hanging where the sun had in the morning. Fires as well as lamps were lighted in the parsonage, the shutters tightly closed and the curtains drawn so that no appearance of the great event should shine out upon the villagers. Ruth had dreaded to have it noised about. Noel had been in since school, but said nothing of the matter, proof positive that he knew nothing of it. Now, they sat around the fire awaiting the coming of their father and his bride.

The latter none of them had seen. The wedding took place quietly at her home. Mr. Hawthorne had wished Ruth to attend, but she had declined on pretexts which seemed sufficiently reasonable even to him.

Lily had just been entrusted with the important secret, and, considering Channing her special charge, lost no time in communicating it to him.

"You look weal pwitty, all dwessed up in your little wed dwess, but you must *be* a pwitty boy, too, 'cause you're going to have a mamma."

"Mamma," shouted the little fellow.

"Oh, he wants her to come," said Lilian, turning to Ruth. "Yes, you're going to have a mamma just like Georgie Brown's. You don't know how nice it is. I had one once, but she went away, 'way off to heaven, and now she can't get back. But this one'll be a weal live mamma; she a'n't going to have any wings 'tall, and her hands'll be warm just like Woodie's. She'll dwess Channy and me all up nice evewy day, and we shall be so happy! Won't we, Mawt?"

"Being dressed up nice won't make you happy."

"Yes, it will too. A'n't you glad, Woodie, that we are going to have a mamma?"

The sister did not reply, but thought within herself: "Oh that I knew as little of the evil in the world as she, then might I be as trustful and happy. But now I am wretched."

"Say, Woodie, a'n't you glad?"

"She won't be your own mamma ; only a step-mother."

Ruth regretted the words as soon as they were spoken.

"Why won't she be my own? Mawtie said she would, and I guess he knows as well as you, Woodie Hawfwone, for papa told him."

Lilian was vexed, and taking her doll and little chair went across the room to sit by Mark, after which she had very little to say. Channing grew sleepy, and the nurse put him to bed.

Mr. Hawthorne and his wife came early, and the greetings were warm on both sides, except that Ruth seemed cold and distant, and did not say mother. Mark was shy, but Lilian speedily made the acquaintance of the stranger, and before going to bed made her promise to be her own mother.

Ruth was agreeably surprised, and yet not agreeably, having painted to herself a woman of little character, except perhaps religious, of which she affected a very light estimate ; a weak woman whom she could annoy and control ; an element of contention in the house ; a nurse, a housekeeper whom her father would dignify with the name of wife, while, if she chose, she herself could re-

main the real mistress. Of course she should not choose, and, as a consequence, their pleasant home would be rendered uncomfortable and unattractive by bad management, over which she should duly mourn, but which she almost hoped would be.

But there was nothing of this in the tall, dignified, sweet-faced lady to whom the daughter was introduced, who evidently had been formed to command as well as comfort, who knew her place and would recognize Ruth's. Hard, selfish or cruel she could not be. Yet the girl, not to be defeated, asked: "What does this woman, an old maid, know about children? What sympathy could she have with them?"

If she could have stood apart and watched her own thoughts with the eyes of another, she would have seen herself thinking in language she would blush to utter and indulging in purposes she would blush to own.

With such quiet grace and dignity did Mrs. Hawthorne slip into her place and assume her new duties, titles and relationships that she seemed to have been always there. And in the circle of her husband's charge she proved herself both an ornament and an efficient worker. After

her advent there were few lonely evenings in the parsonage.

"She is a rare and beautiful woman," said Mabel to Ruth, "who commands my reverence and my heart. I do think you are the most fortunate of girls to have such companionship."

"She is a stepmother, Mabel; taking a place that ought never to be filled, nor can it be with me."

"Of course you will remember your own mother, but she will be a great blessing to you. You cannot help loving her, I am sure."

"I wish I could feel so. You have never had such a trial."

Did Ruth wish she could feel so? Her question had been: "What does this woman know of children?" yet of all the facts in a history which seemed to have been written out beforehand in the mind of Providence expressly to fit her for that place she was willingly ignorant. She meant to be noble, was called so, and felt quite well satisfied with herself. But nobleness implies gratitude, generosity, flinging aside prejudice, while her whole life had been spent without thanks to Him to whom she was indebted for everything, and now she utterly refused to be pleased with one

who had come to be her best friend. She was even jealous of the affection the little children gave their new mother.

Mrs. Hawthorne was one of the oldest of a large family, the favorite sister of all the younger children, who had ever found her a help in time of trouble. Her mother too had died. Her father had married a second and a third time; and if things at home had not been always according to her choice, that place was always pleasanter for her presence. Some years before her marriage she had been forced through delicate health to seek a milder climate, and this had given her several winters in a Southern city, where, mingling much with the best, most intelligent and most cultivated people, her mind had acquired a wider scope, and to her natural grace was added that ease which only society can give. Then, when returning vigor had made her stay no longer necessary, she had gone back to her country home to be the companion and teacher of brothers and sisters. She had accompanied her family to the West, and after two years returned to visit a brother and sister. At her sister's house she had first met Mr. Hawthorne.

All the discipline of her life was not apparent

to the world. Whether she had experienced any peculiar trials which caused her to add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, to patience godliness, and to godliness sisterly kindness, and to sisterly kindness charity, was not fully known, but it is certain that these things were in her abounding.

People wondered why she had not married; the secret remained unrevealed. She had a brother of whom, because of his want of character and intelligence, it was naturally inferred that she could not be proud; but that he was a trouble or mortification to her could not be gathered from word or deed, or the absence thereof on her part, unless it was that for him she manifested an especial tenderness.

There was a place in her heart for every child, and especially for the children of her husband. Loving him, she would have loved his family if they had not been the bright, happy, and sweetly naughty ones they were; and the happiest relations were soon established between her and Mark, Lilian and Channing. A change was immediately visible in the household, though the process by which it was effected was in itself

scarcely discernible. Ann came down wonderfully, making no disturbance now, but going on quietly with her work. She seemed in some way to have learned better the art of cooking, for the food came to the table in better order and more palatable, while its cost was considerably reduced. She knew that she had to deal now not with a girl, but with an experienced woman who would be the real head of the kitchen, who had resources in herself, and whom she could not frighten by complaints. Since Ann did so well, her own health was so good and her husband not wealthy, it seemed to Mrs. Hawthorne, after a little, best to dispense with the services of the nurse, in whom she had not confidence. There was also a change as quietly brought about in the clothing of the children. They had been pets and the recipients of many favors in the shape of garments, fanciful and pretty, but few that were serviceable for every-day wear. Ruth's taste had also expended itself chiefly in matters of form and color, and the clothing she had purchased being mostly of the same kind as that which was given them, its beauty was soon destroyed, and it was thrown aside for new. Health also was in a measure sacrificed to prettiness.

But the new mother did not set herself about working a reform here without consulting Ruth, whose taste she followed as far as possible. The material purchased for winter was warm and substantial, and was tastefully made up, with a view to comfort, in which the fastidious and willing eye of the daughter found but little which she could consistently criticise, while the father was greatly pleased.

But when we choose to be fault-finding there is always room, and Ruth, discovering a few things not exactly to her mind, took occasion, by dropping a word or two, to render Lilian dissatisfied with her mother's management. The little girl's love of dress was extreme, and the seed sown sprang up quickly.

"I don't want to wear this gweat woollen dwess," she said, one morning. "It's jest as ugly as it can be."

"Oh yes, darling, I would wear it. It is just what you need this cold weather. Only see how nice and warm it is!"

"But it a'n't pwitty."

"Mamma thinks it is very pretty. The color is bright and so are the buttons, and the trimming is very soft. I think it is the best dress

my little Lilian could wear, it looks so well and is so comfortable."

The child looked at the garment and then up to the admiring face of the mother, half in pleasure, half in doubt.

"Woodie don't think it's pwitty."

Mrs. Hawthorne was hurt, but quickly smothered her pain.

"Mamma is sorry if Ruth does not like it. I think she hasn't seen her little sister wear it much, or she would think it nice too. What would papa say?"

The child ran to her father.

"See my dwess! Woodie don't like it, mamma does; is it pwitty, papa?"

"Yes, dear, it is just what I like to see you wear. I'm very glad you have such a dress."

Lilian went away satisfied, for her father's judgment was always final with her.

When Mrs. Hawthorne came, Lilian, so long entrusted to a hireling, had forgotten the prayers her mother had taught. Now she learned them again, and heard of the Saviour from one whose lips loved to speak of him, and his story, told more beautifully than her father or Mark could have made it, more lovingly than Ruth had the

power to utter it, had for the little girl a new charm. Channy, too, became a listener and soon could repeat short verses that held the dearest of all names. Lilian was delighted to hear him say his little prayer, and would tell Ruth about it almost every morning.

Mark also had one to whom he could go as he used to go to his own mother, who could sometimes discover his difficulties before he named them—sometimes before they were known to himself—to whom he could tell his trials as he could not to his father, sure of a sympathizing ear and helping word.

Ruth, who was now more at liberty than she had been since the death of her mother, spent little time at home except when there was company, and seemed to feel that this was just what she should do, the only way to escape abuse at home. Vain were all the little expedients of Mrs. Hawthorne to win her there. Over this course the father mourned. That the daughter whose qualities of mind and heart had given him so much pleasure should become frivolous seemed too great a grief for him to bear. But it was worse than frivolity—a deliberate waste of time and of her best powers. From November

to March she spent only two or three evenings with the family, and these were so stormy that she could not get out. Nominally, her studies were kept up, but the lessons were poorly learned, her thoughts being elsewhere. Her father remonstrated.

"Ruth," he said, "we miss you at home. There is a place in our little circle which you alone can fill. Will you not give us more of your presence?"

"My dear father," she replied, pleasantly, "do you really need me? I supposed you could dispense with my company very well now, since you have a wife."

"Wife and all my children help to make up the sum of my happiness. But it is not mine alone that is to be considered. Your mother needs you. She has found kind friends, and I hope a pleasant home, yet her task is a difficult one, which no one can do so much to lighten as you. You have the power to make her very happy, and I dare say, my dear child, that in no other way could you add so effectually to your own happiness. The children, too, need your society and good example. Mark will soon aspire to the liberties you take—indeed, he chafes now

under his restrictions as he would not were you not so entirely mistress of yourself. Lily makes you her standard and wants to be what you are."

"But I am here every day, and it seems to me that the family have all of my company that is agreeable. Things go on with exceeding smoothness nowadays, prospering far better than under my reign. It looks to me as if I were no longer needed."

"You know that we all love you, your mother not excepted."

Ruth frowned.

"And loving you, we need you, but you need us quite as much. All I have said is true, and it is likewise true that you of all are the greatest loser by the course you are pursuing. These are golden hours whose loss you can never make up, and you are forming bad habits of mind, from which, live as long as you may, you can never fully recover. They will hamper you for ever. I entreat you to give a little heed to the future, and to remember that a reaping-time will surely come.

"I have been forbidden by you and have obeyed, but now I must speak. Turn whichever way you please, to life stretched out in a long

road before you or to meet death close at hand, you will soon reach eternity. There is no escape. It rests with you now to choose either the pleasures for evermore, or the worm that dieth not. I am afraid you are making the wrong choice. I am troubled about you, my daughter."

Mr. Hawthorne's voice trembled and tears coursed down his cheeks. He paused to regain the composure necessary to enable him to go on.

"But remember that you cannot choose for yourself alone. If you take misery, you will drag others after you, if you do not push them on before you to irretrievable loss. You are even now sowing the seeds of discontent and consequent unhappiness in our home."

"Why, papa!"

"You do not know it, I think, but you are dropping little words here and there—the natural outgrowth of the state of heart you cherish—which are calculated to provoke unholy and hurtful purposes in some pure lives."

"You speak in riddles, my dear father."

"If you will take the trouble, you can guess them, and I pray you to spare me the pain of greater plainness. I hope and believe that you have only been unguarded without meaning to do

harm. I ask you to guard well your thoughts and lips. If the meditations of the heart be right, the words cannot be far amiss."

"But I wish you would explain."

"Examine yourself, my dear, and see whether you have that charity which envieth not, vaunteth not itself, thinketh no evil. Remember that you cannot continue long in one course of wrong-feeling and wrong-doing without being led into another.

"Ask yourself whether more of your society is not due to us, and whether you cannot find pleasure with us, who love you so much, as well as in the company of those who care comparatively little for you. Try to find more time for your studies, time to practice, and some time to help your mother."

There was no part of what her father had said that Ruth did not understand, and, going from his presence, she reviewed it all and brought herself to trial. But so specious were the pleadings and so partial was the judge that self was not only acquitted, but held up in the light of a wronged and suffering saint. So blinded was she that she went on cherishing those same ungenerous and wicked thoughts, and dropping those very

seeds of discord in the family, until the children began to distrust the mother who had made them so happy, and Ruth actually to hate her. There were willful misunderstandings of her words and actions, and the faithful woman toward whom this spirit was indulged saw it all with pity and sorrow.

No complaints concerning his child were poured into her husband's ear. Mrs. Hawthorne always met Ruth with a smile, and spoke to and of her kindly. She interested herself still in her welfare, and did all in her power to promote her happiness. She expected in time to overcome, and so long as her husband's confidence in her remained unshaken she could endure. If that strongest earthly rock, her resting-place, should be undermined, there was still a sure Foundation and Refuge.





CHAPTER XV.

AMONG SHADOWS.

RUTH had been long expecting to see Mr. McMinn. He was not the only one who had thus taken advantage of their hospitality, but him especially she could not forget. Now that he was connected with the family she remembered him with indignation. While she could have borne with an idiot, pitying him for his misfortunes, for one having less than the average amount of brain-power, yet going among men as a man, she had no patience. She would have been more lenient toward crime. Whatever else she might forgive her stepmother, she could not forgive her being sister to such a man. Down among the meaner motives for her ill conduct had been the expectation of annoyance from him.

He came at length, and no welcome could have been more cordial than that his sister gave, while

Mr. Hawthorne's greeting was all that could have been required.

"Ah, Ruth," said Mr. McMinn, with the usual cough, and extending his hand, while she mentally corrected him with "Miss Hawthorne," "I little thought when you entertained me so pleasantly—let me see, how long ago was it? ahem, I remember now—not quite a year, if my memory serves me."

"Nearly two years, Mr. McMinn."

"Nearly two years! I little thought we should ever claim relationship, especially one so near and dear. Ah, my dear niece, how do you do?"

Ruth had taken the hand, and now replied, half in amusement, half in scorn, that she was very well. The man turned to the younger children:

"And this is another niece, a little one. Lily, I believe. Are you glad to see your uncle, my dear?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Oh, here is the youngest—the baby—a fine boy! What shall I call him, brother Hawthorne?—brother Samuel, I should say now."

"Channing."

"Oh, Channing, Channing! Glad to see your uncle, a'n't you, Channing."

The little one did not look glad when the new relative lifted him high in the air by way of beginning an acquaintance, and on being put down, ran to his mother, and hiding his face, began to cry.

"He is timid with strangers," said Mr. Hawthorne, apologetically.

"Ah, I didn't know that. Some children are. That is the case with some children. They're afraid of strangers. But I didn't know he was."

There was, after all, a little change in Mrs. Hawthorne's manner, for she talked somewhat more rapidly than usual, and devoted herself more entirely to her company. Ruth remained in the room to watch developments, and by and by, when the twilight came on and Mr. McMinn asked for music, seated herself at the piano with great readiness and played some of her simplest pieces. He was extravagant in praises, and thought it must require a great deal of time, as well as natural ability, to learn to execute so well what must be very difficult. She played a few chords carelessly, when he said he liked that tune—what were the words? Ruth laughed

aloud, but, covering her fault, went on to draw him out and make him appear as ridiculous as possible, knowing that his sister was listening with pain. Mrs. Hawthorne came to his rescue, and the daughter, seeing that her father was displeased, blushed under his look of reproof.

"The temptation was too great," she said, inwardly. "It's too rich for anything, and asking altogether too much of poor human nature to keep up one's dignity and self-respect under such circumstances. I shall be obliged to leave this family circle, made happy by the advent of its uncle."

She rose to go from the room when the ringing of the bell called her to the door, where was Mabel, who, on being taken to the parlor, said :

"Please, Ruth, don't make me a stranger, but let me go into the sitting-room, where I know you were just now. I've brought my knitting, and want to have a quiet visit with you all. It is such a treat to spend an evening with your father and mother, and it is lonely enough at home with Frank away. You have no idea how I watch the time between his vacations."

Mabel was warmly received, was glad for Mrs. Hawthorne's sake to meet the stranger, and, true

lady as she was, listened to his commonplace utterances with as much apparent interest as though they had been freighted with wisdom, and made such generous responses that the sister almost doubted for the time her brother's mental imbecility. If anything were wanting to make Ruth ashamed of her own conduct, it was her friend's politeness.

Mrs. Hawthorne pressed Mabel's hand warmly when she went away, and longed to speak her gratitude for such kindness.

The next morning Mr. McMinn was early in the sitting-room, trying to ingratiate himself with Lillian, who would have nothing to say to him. By and by, Ruth found her in her little chair at his back, pointing her finger at him and making the worst possible faces, at first seeming to be completely absorbed in the exercise, but on becoming conscious of her sister's presence, looking up unblushingly for approval.

"Lily!" said Ruth, in her sternest manner.

"What?"

"Come with me." They went into the nursery.

"Don't you know that that was very naughty?"

"No; you do so."

"Never, Lily."

"You did somesin last night. You don't think he's a bit pwitty."

"Did you ever hear me say so?"

"No, but I know."

"You should never treat any one so rudely, whether you like him or not, but be kind always. Mr. McMinn is a very nice man, I suppose—your mamma's brother."

When they were again in the sitting-room, Lillian was quite as averse to the acquaintance as before, but after breakfast, on learning that he had been a sailor and could tell her stories of the sea, was quite willing to sit upon his knee and listen. At last she said, by way of thanks,

"Woodie don't like you, but I do. She don't like mamma, either, but I do."

Ruth heard it and was sorely displeased. Was it possible that all her actions were thus transparent to the child?

Lily had found a friend, and all that day entertained him according to the best of her ability, introducing him to the curiosities and treasures of the house, and forcing him to carry Channing about wherever she pleased, until evening, when he took his departure.

That night the little Lilian complained of not being well, and before morning was so very ill that both parents were up to attend her and the doctor was called in. It was feared that she was no better when Ruth came down stairs, and was surprised and frightened to find how ill the child had been. In her excitement her self-control entirely departed, and her long-cherished feelings found vent in fitting expression. Bending over the couch, she cried,

"Oh, my pet, my darling! lying at death's door, and no one came for me, her own sister, who has cared for her so long! It was my place to have been here instead of a stranger. How could she feel for her as I could?"

Mr. Hawthorne was startled and grieved. However Ruth might have felt, such words were new to her lips. The mother paused to control herself and then said, gently,

"Don't feel so, dear. We knew how much you would be troubled, and wished to save you pain."

"Don't call me dear; you know you don't mean it. You hate me. Do not add to that by playing the hypocrite."

"My poor child!" said the mother as soon as

she could recover from her astonishment enough to speak. "I am sorry that you can so misunderstand me;" and she turned away.

"Ruth," said her father, in a tone of severity unusual to him, "never let me hear you speak thus to your mother again! You will break her heart and mine."

"And if mine is broken, it is no matter," retorted Ruth.

"You are beside yourself this morning. Say no more until you can be reasonable."

Ruth obeyed, but all her motions revealed the anger ruling within. Although ignorant of the doctor's orders, which it was imperative should be complied with, she would do nothing outside of the sick room, and, insisting on having the entire charge of her sister, repulsed the faithful woman who still hovered near to render all the aid in her power. Mr. Hawthorne said no more, but quietly taking the little one in his arms, made requests of each to do that for which he thought her best fitted; and the daughter became in a little while ashamed of her conduct, though not of the state of heart which prompted it. She made no apologies, and none seemed to be required by the mother, who treated her as though

nothing had been said or done to disturb the harmony of the household.

Lily grew worse, and Ruth was soon glad to give up all responsibility to one with more experience than herself. It was impossible to be angry with the death shadow over one deeply loved.

Tenderly as an own mother could, and if possible more assiduously, Mrs. Hawthorne watched the little sufferer, while the father and daughter stood by mute and helpless.

There came after a few days a dark time when the young soul seemed almost freed from its beautiful yet crumbling home in the body, and they said, "She is dying."

"Oh, it is cruel! it is cruel!" sobbed Ruth, and fled from the house to her customary refuge, the humble abode of Mrs. Jennison.

At first the invalid suffered the weeping girl's head to lie on her lap in silence, caressing it with her distorted hand, and weeping also. For what can words avail to heal the aching when God smites the soul? But at length she spoke:

"It is hard for Ruth and all the rest, but good for Lily. Ruth's heart is tossed about by mighty winds. And there's a great fog come down over

her, making it seem as if there wasn't any sky at all; she can't see no sun 'cause there's so much to hide it. It's all dark in her soul, and she don't have no rest. There isn't love enough in there now, and it seems as if God was taking out what there is, in taking away the sweet little sister. She's got all the trouble she can bear, and some way she's got to get out of it, or 't'll last till long after the earth melts away, and the sun drops out of its place, and the sky is rolled up like a paper scroll.

"Oh, this trouble'll last for ever if she don't get rid of it. God is trying to cure it, and will if she'll let him. But Lily never'll have none if she goes away now. She won't crawl about with her eyes shet, trying to find something she oughtn't to have, to cure the aching inside without him. There won't be any aching, for the good Shepherd'll have her in his arms and she'll see his face with the love in it—see him smile, and give him her little innocent heart. She won't never cry, never get tired. She won't never need any little books to learn out of, for there'll be the great ones all opened; there'll be plenty of light to see 'em with, and somebody—mebby her own dear mother—will teach her to

read 'em. Mebby it'll be the Saviour himself, and you know he won't tell anything wrong."

Mabel came in search of Ruth and sat softly down beside her, taking her hands in silent sympathy.

"My little Mary's up there; mebby though she isn't little no longer—Hannah isn't—and in such a pleasant country they ought to grow as fast as they do down here. I've thought these things over about her a good many times."

At the mention of little Mary a vision of Aunt Jenny's desolated life came to Ruth and made her almost ashamed of her own repinings. But it was no easier to give up Lily, and her thoughts, going back to that dear, suffering one, brought a fresh burst of tears.

"Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," continued the old woman, "and they say that was pretty wise for them days, because he went to live in the house of the king. But his brethren had to keep at work at the bricks. Lily'll live in the house of the King too, and be learned in a greater wisdom, but we're to work at the bricks, and it's tough. We have to learn everything in hard ways; all these aches and tears is learning us. 'Seems as though we're so

dull we can't find out anything without 'em, but up there they're brighter and don't need 'em.

"It'll seem dreadful dark in the house to have the little flower gone. Nobody'll ever say Woodie as she did, and it's right to miss her and sob, for we can't help it, but it's *better* to think what she's gone to, and it won't be but a *little* while before we shall see her if we are right. Ain't it selfish, girls, to want to keep the children out of glory when their heavenly Father calls 'em?"

Auntie said no more, and Ruth and Mabel sat sobbing at her feet.

Meanwhile, many had gathered in the parsonage to render aid and witness the departure of the little pet, and some felt it an unkindness to be excluded from the room where she lay, where the mother sat tearfully but not blindly watching, and firmly but politely keeping out all but her husband, the doctor and Mark, in order that the air might remain pure as possible.

But death had not entered the house. The crisis passed and the shadow was lifted. Ruth returned in time to hear the doctor say to her father :

"She is saved, not through my skill, but your wife's good care. Thank her."

Glad as she was, these were unpleasant words to Ruth.

In a few days Mrs. Hawthorne herself became ill, rather from weariness than disease, and the daughter cared for her from a sense of duty, as for a stranger, and could not help being grateful to Mr. McMinn, who had returned and was ready to help, and who kindly attended Lily through her convalescence, bearing with her peevishness with the gentleness of a woman. He was a simple man, weak in intellect and purpose, but a child of God, and in spirit as a little child.

Her mother recovered and fever came to Ruth, straightway leading her into the land of shadows, through whose vapors she could but dimly see the actual world, where dismal shapes and ghastly faces gathered thick around her bed or followed one another in a long, horrid procession through the room. She knew nothing of the tenderness with which she was cared for by her mother, Mabel and others, how in agony that would not let him rest her father prayed for her life as he had not for Lilian's, crying, "Yet a little more time;" and "He who delighteth not in the death of the sinner" heard.

She came back to herself to find her hands

thin and white and her strength so wasted that it was a weariness to move; to find that death had not forgotten her, but had stood by her bedside and departed with reluctance. What if she should have been taken? The thought brought a shudder and a half resolution to attend to her relations to her Maker, to examine the mission of the Saviour more closely and seek him for her guide through the dark valley.

But as there remained to her no power to think, the examination must be postponed. Her feelings were chiefly concerned with what she should eat, and she shed tears when her food was not of the right kind or not brought quite quickly enough.

Mabel sat many days with the invalid during her slow return to health, and a few times, at Ruth's request, read in her hearing sweet chapters from the Bible. The physical world was waking into life and beauty. Was the sun of righteousness rising in her soul after the long, dreary winter? Her friends hoped for bright skies and summer flowers there, but the season had not yet come.



CHAPTER XVI.

SCHOOL.

HEALTH perfect as of old returned to Ruth, and with roses blooming again in her cheeks and a softer light in her eyes, she seemed to her friends more lovely than before. Remembering all that her mother had done, she determined now to treat her with kindness, and summer days laden with peace as well as sweet sights and sounds came and went at the parsonage. Frank came home to spend the long vacation, and devoted himself to his sister, who insisted upon having Ruth to accompany them everywhere, in their rambles in the woods, fishing excursions, rides or quiet visits at home, where there was much graceful and improving conversation, but no discussion of theology. Then came the pleasing but unexpected announcement to the

two girls that they were to spend a year in the ladies' seminary in Dayton, the town where Frank was in college.

They were already equal in mental attainments to most of the graduates of that and other schools, but it had been a part of Mr. Hawthorne's plan to send his daughter away where she could have better advantages in music, learn some of those feminine accomplishments which it was out of his province to teach, and gain experience from which she would be shut out at home. Deacon Hope thought Mabel knew enough of books already, and could not see how he and her mother could live a whole year with no child at home, but if Mr. Hawthorne thought it necessary for Ruth, it must be no less so for his daughter, and she should go too. Frank had been in the secret and pleaded that they might be sent to Dayton.

Ruth had had a passion for school and a strong desire to see something of the great world beyond the village of Hopeton. Not that much would be visible from the window of the little room in the third or fourth story of a prim building, from which egress could be had only at certain times and under restrictions, but there would at least be diversity among her schoolmates and teachers,

and it was people rather than things that she cared for.

Mr. Hawthorne accompanied them to Dayton. Arriving late in the afternoon, they found the seminary grounds so fine that it seemed impossible that it could be otherwise than delightful to live there. But on entering the building a chill fell on them. Not that the hall and the parlor where they were seated waiting the coming of the principal were not airy and well-lighted, but everything was on a large, stiff, public pattern, lacking the coziness of home. Ruth broke the silence of expectation by announcing her danger of freezing.

"The temperature will soften in a day or two, I imagine," said Mabel; "meanwhile, we must warm ourselves by our courage."

"Truly the voice of Hope! It is possible that proper appreciation of home is to be one of our branches of study. That being the case, you may already rejoice over your prodigy, my father, for I give promise of being an apt scholar. At this rate I shall be ready to graduate in a week's time."

"Don't be too confident," he said, with a smile, beginning a sentence whose completion the en-

trance of Mr. and Mrs. Bontelle compelled him to postpone.

Pleasant people they proved to be, receiving the strangers cordially, but with something of the air of those long accustomed to teach. As Mr. Hawthorne was to return the same evening, business must be attended to. He went to the office and the young ladies were shown to their room.

The most of the doors passed on their way through the halls were closed, but two or three open ones disclosed forlorn-looking persons like themselves unpacking trunks. In another, broom in hand, stood a barefooted Irish woman, with disordered hair and tattered dress, while piles of dirt upon the floor attested her skill. On reaching their own apartment they found a faded carpet, which gave no indications of ever having been handsome, unpapered walls, bearing marks of matches, and names of girls written in pairs to indicate the perpetuity of their friendship. The one large, curtainless window, also scratched and otherwise disfigured, had evidently been cleaned for their benefit, which was comforting, as was the fact that their trunks contained bedspreads, sheets and pillow-cases. Three worn

chairs and a table thoroughly mottled with ink spots, bruises and furrows ploughed by slate pencils completed the furniture.

Ruth and Mabel looked around in silence and then at each other. Ruth laughed.

"I have never had the least expectation of martyrdom for myself," she said, "but now the probabilities are strong that I shall be a heroine. Gazing round this classic room, sacred to learning, I feel the spirit of my predecessors thrill me. I shall walk in their footsteps. I—"

"It is to be hoped, then, that your predecessors are not Susy Giles and Mary Ann Bennett, whose names I see so frequently. They do not impress me favorably. And for the sake of those who are to follow I hope you will not be so free in the use of your pencil as they have been."

Being summoned to tea, which they were to have by themselves, they found Mr. Hawthorne waiting them on the first floor, and descended to the basement.

"Oh how cold!" said Ruth, with a shiver.

"Somewhat cooler than the sunshine without," responded her father, "and to me quite refreshing."

"Papa, stay here; the atmosphere would suit

you, I know, and perhaps you could get a professorship."

"I am afraid not; the air of Hopeton is better and home pleasanter."

"Mabel, help me thank him for those words. We are sure of sympathy now."

"Yes, but you are not here for pleasure, and will like it when you become acquainted and get at work."

The presence of the good man, so dear to both, who invoked a blessing on the food and those he was leaving, caused the great room, with its long, empty tables, to seem pleasant for the time being, and Ruth, whose feelings made her unable to look up to meet the eyes of her father, saw Mabel raise her handkerchief as though to wipe away tears. The simplicity of the repast was scarcely observed; no one ate much, and the time spent at the table was short and taken up principally with counsel from Mr. Hawthorne, messages to be sent home and the few last words. On ascending the first flight of stairs, adieus were spoken and they parted.

When again in their room, Ruth threw herself upon the bed and Mabel took a seat by the window, wiping her eyes in order to see more plainly

the landscape, flooded then with the glories of dying day. The sun had just disappeared from its path of flame, but hills and trees were yet tipped with its gold, while far away as it could well be and yet reveal itself, wound a silvery ribbon of light, which she knew to be the river. God was there, all his beautiful creation seeming to exult in his presence, and she could do the same, feeling that sweet sense of safety and repose which belongs to the Christian. She had need to be anxious for nothing, for her Father was everywhere, and however far she might go, there would his hand lead her. Nothing could make her miserable, since "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There was a difference between the two friends. Ruth, naturally more sprightly and light-hearted; had all the time some trouble to tread under her feet which it was difficult to keep there, but Mabel's peace was like a river. While one was weeping the other rejoiced.

Mabel opened the shutters, and Ruth, rising to

a sitting posture, wiped her eyes and opened them wide.

"Mabel Hope, it isn't fair of you to steal the march on me this way. I hadn't begun to be a heroine yet, but was only getting ready, and to give up and cry is a most excellent preparation! But there you sit looking sublimely happy as though you had come to a paradise instead of a prison. Have you been laughing in your sleeves at me all this time?"

"No, my dear, not at all; you have my warmest sympathy."

"Then you are a darling good body. Thanks to my father that he didn't incarcerate me alone."

"Yes, it is a comfort. What could either of us do alone? And we seem to be made to go together. I wonder if we shall ever be separated?"

"Oh, I hope not; and if you leave here before this year is gone, I shall certainly go too. I couldn't possibly stay without you. Could you if I were gone?"

"Yes, possibly, but—"

"And be happy?"

"Yes, I *could*, but it would be much easier to be happy with you."

"That seems a queer way of talking, but happiness *is* the result of effort, after all. It is seldom spontaneous with me, and judging from myself, I should be inclined to think it a sham. But you seem always to have a quiet little river of happiness running through your being."

"I am glad you think so, Ruth. Father and Frank tell me the same, and I believe I am among the most highly favored of human beings."

"But are you really so glad and at rest, or do you only seem so, like me?"

"I am really very glad and at rest."

"Now? To-night? I can hardly believe you. What have you been doing?—discovering a mine of diamonds, finding some of Captain Kidd's money, engaging yourself to a rich lover, or what is it?"

"Were you in earnest you would be a poor guesser. I am afraid those things would make me miserable."

"I don't think they would make me so."

"But, Ruth, you are not wrong, after all, for I did find a mine of diamonds in the sunset—polished and flashing right royally; there was a beautiful palace built for me which no one could

rob me of, and everywhere beamed the face of a King—one who loves me.”

“I understand you; you are very poetical to-night;” and Ruth unlocked her trunk and began vigorously unpacking her things and putting them where they were to stay, while her friend resumed her own work. A merry time they had, for Ruth was unusually, perhaps extravagantly, gay.

While thus engaged a lamp was brought, and they had hardly finished when one of the teachers came. Knowing how hard it seemed to be forced to stay in such a room when they had just come from real homes, she comforted them by her sympathy, assuring them they would find it pleasant after a time, and hinting that the hardest things might prove the most valuable. She had been there seven years, and they had been her happiest years.

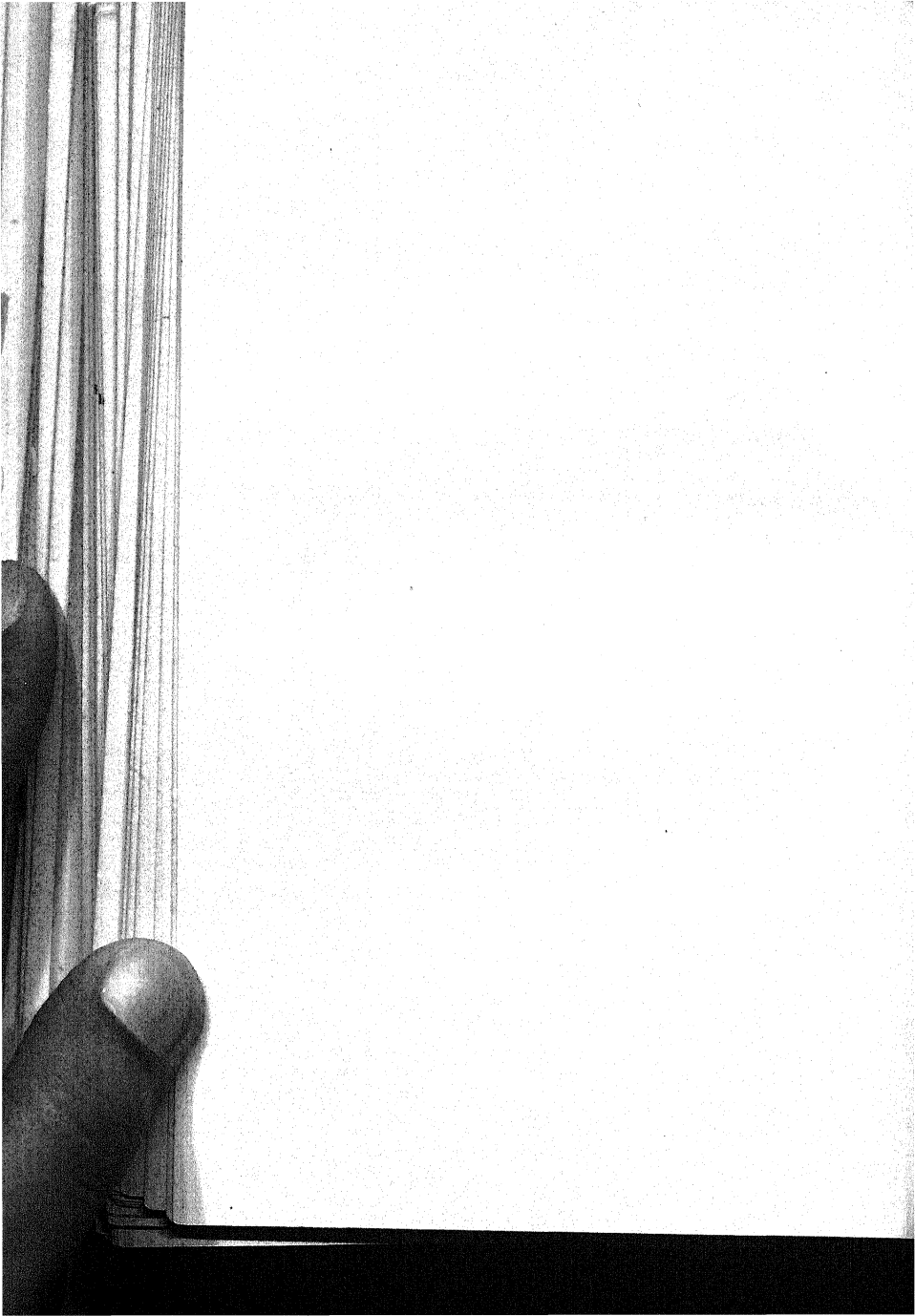
“She is one of your sort, Mabel,” said Ruth, when the lady had gone—“a bird singing in its cage, keeping its colors as bright and its song as sweet as though all these years had been spent in its native forest. How my heroism sinks! there isn’t a shade of a chance for me to distinguish myself in that way. If heroism is contagious, I



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Ruth Hawthorne.

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may possibly have a touch of it, but where's the merit?"

"Don't be discouraged so soon. Your time is awaiting you."

"But I fear I shall not be ready for it."

The hour for sleep came. Each took her Bible to read, and having completed her chapter, Ruth went to bed, while Mabel knelt in silent prayer.

The former looked on with interest, for it was a rare sight to one accustomed to occupy her chamber alone.

"A sweet fanatic!" she said to herself. "I wonder whether she really finds comfort in such an exercise, or does it as a duty merely. I suppose the former, for she seems to have many joys in which I have no share. If I had been one of those happy creatures, like Angie Mead, whose energies never compel her to think, I should have been a sister in the church before now. But if I were a Christian, believing as they do, I should be terribly in earnest, making my presence almost unendurable because of being so anxious for every one. But Angie is at ease, and can spend more money than ever on herself. I should be forced by conscience to give away. I actually believe some people think everything

done when they have made a profession of religion. But Mabel is not like Angie."

Again Ruth's eyes rested on the white figure kneeling by the bed, and she fell to repeating in thought a scrap from "La Mennois," which long ago she had been required to translate and commit to memory:

"When you have prayed, do you not feel your heart lighter and your soul more at ease?"

"Prayer renders affliction less painful, and joy more pure; it blends with the one a something strengthening and sweet, and with the other a celestial perfume.

"What are you doing upon the earth, and have you nothing to ask of the One who has placed you here?"

"You are a traveler seeking his native land. Go not with the head bowed down; it is necessary to lift the eyes in order to recognize the route.

"Your country is the sky; and when you look at the sky does nothing stir within you? does no desire press you? or is this desire mute?"

"There are those who say, 'Of what use is prayer? God is too far above us to listen to such pitiful creatures.'

"And who then has made these pitiful crea-

tures? Who has given them feeling, thought and speech if it is not God?

"And if he has been so good toward them, was it to forsake them afterward and drive them far away from him?

"Verily I say unto you, whosoever says in his heart that God despises his works blasphemes God.

"There are others who say, 'Of what use is prayer? Does not God know better than we what we need?'

"God knows better than you what you need, and for that reason wishes you to ask it of him; for God himself is your first need, and to pray to God is to begin to possess God.

"The father knows the wants of his son; should the son therefore never have a word of request and thanksgiving for the father?

"When animals suffer, when they fear or are hungry, they send forth plaintive cries. These cries are the prayer which they address to God, and God hears it. Should man then be the only being in creation whose voice is never to mount to the ear of the Creator?

"There passes sometimes over the fields a wind which dries up the plants, and then their withered

stems are seen hanging toward the earth; but moistened by the dew they resume their freshness and lift their languishing heads.

“There are always burning winds which pass over the soul of man and wither it. Prayer is the dew which makes it fresh again.”





CHAPTER XVII.

BECOMING ACQUAINTED.

THE next morning on descending to the dining-room the girls were assigned a place at the table, where presided a little, flip-pant French lady, who, after the blessing had been asked by Professor Bontelle at the principal table, politely made her pupils acquainted with each other, speaking always in her own tongue. Ruth, who attracted attention much sooner than Mabel, was asked her residence. Being seized with a sudden distrust of her old pronunciation, she replied in English.

“Speak in French, if you please. It is one of our regulations, and imperative for those who are learning the language,” said mademoiselle, waiting for a repetition of the answer in the required form, which Ruth gave according to her best ability.

"And the town takes its name from the family of your friend?"

"Oui, mademoiselle," said Ruth, congratulating herself that there was one thing she could speak correctly.

"Ah, that is a great compliment, a very great compliment, M^{lle} Hope."

Mabel wanted to say that it was an honor to her grandfather, but she believed not necessarily one to her own family, but the words would not come, and she was forced to content herself with stammering out thanks with a blush, when, to her great relief, the teacher addressed herself to others who could speak more fluently—so fluently that she and Ruth could hardly distinguish the words.

Alas for their French! They knew the grammar through and through, had committed to memory page after page of conversational sentences and idiomatic phrases, none of which seemed to be available now. They had read books, until as a general thing it was quite as easy to read a page in French as in English, had written a limited number of notes to each other in that language, and made strong resolutions at times to converse in no other tongue when by

themselves, which resolutions always had to be broken before they could make progress in visiting. Now there were no words at their command, and, in the midst of strangers, most of whom must be critical, they were glad to remain silent, hoping by so doing to escape further trial. But again Mabel was addressed, and managed to reply in words sufficiently correct, though the construction was English, as she saw before she had finished speaking. Ruth, in a similar case, interspersed German words in an awkward French sentence which ended in her own tongue. So amusing was it to all at the table that it was difficult to suppress laughter.

"You will pardon the young lady, who may understand our language, but is not accustomed to speak it," said the teacher.

"I don't know what I have done," said Ruth, bravely; "something very absurd, no doubt, but if some one will explain, I shall be greatly obliged. Forgive me, M^{lle} Soulie, for speaking in English. I cannot help it."

M^{lle} Soulie bowed, smiled, and then explained the error, at which the offender was as much amused as any one.

The meal being completed, there were reading

of the Scriptures and prayers at the table, and all the young ladies knelt.

"That seemed home-like," said Mabel, when they had gone to their room.

"Ma-belle Espérance—your name henceforth—I am thankful for anything that reminds me of home, and my desire to go to France is dead."

Mabel was consulting her dictionary.

"And you are Pitié Aubépine, which I shall not call you. Take courage, *ma chère*; that desire may revive in a year. I expect by and by to do better than some who spoke so fluently this morning, having been able to discover that they were not always accurate."

"Rightly named Hope, Ma-belle."

There was a brief silence, when Ruth, looking up, exclaimed,

"Oh, doleful! what thoughts have given you such a face?"

"Is it so very grave? I was thinking— *Shall* I tell you?"

"Yes, I am impatient."

"I was wondering whether, when I go to the table of my Master above, I shall be speechless as I was this morning. Whether I am so familiarizing myself with the language spoken there that it

will be pleasant for me to hear it, and if the words and thoughts I should be disposed to indulge in would not seem harsh and dissonant."

"Mabel, I have discovered your forte. I will write a book of fables, and you shall append to every one a moral. You will not fail to find one for the poorest."

Now came the summons for a walk, and all being gathered in the lower hall, the teachers arranged their pupils so as to make the best appearance on the street. As far as possible the French scholars were placed near together and requested to do their talking—which was never to interfere with perfect decorum—in that language. Mabel, being taller than Ruth, was to go in advance of her with Miss Winchester, while Ruth followed with Miss Allaire, who was so graceful and winning that her companion was delighted with the arrangement for herself, but pitied poor Mabel, for Miss Winchester was plain and awkward.

"After my sad experience this morning, Miss Allaire, you will forgive me if I am not social."

"We are expected to talk very little, Miss Hawthorne, but you and I must be friends. I like you, and the brave way in which you bore

your misfortunes quite won my heart. Shall we not be friends?" said the young lady, extending her hand.

"I sincerely hope so," Ruth replied, taking the hand warmly. "It will certainly be very dull if we're not, if we are to take these walks every day."

"Twice a day; and I can help you in speaking French, which is one reason why we were put together.

"I am so tired!" said Mabel, after they had returned.

"And I not at all," responded Ruth. "I rather think I am going to enjoy it here in spite of my poor beginnings. Miss Allaire is a beautiful girl whom it will be impossible not to like. Did you like Miss Winchester?"

"I can't tell. She seemed shy of me, and perhaps disappointed in not going with some one else. It was hard walking with her, hard talking in this unknown tongue, and we were not at all social."

"You poor child! I am so sorry for you. By and by it will be pleasanter;" and Ruth gave Mabel a kiss.

"I trust so, but my thoughts are all running to

words; I am afraid they will cease to come after this French drill."

Ruth laughed merrily, but Mabel looked out of the window.

"How queer! you were so happy last night and I so sad; this morning we have changed places."

"Have we? I almost wish we had."

"What do you mean?"

"That in one respect I would be willing to exchange places with you if that were possible."

"You would want to hurry back to yourself, and I should be the gainer."

"I know you would, and that is why I should like it."

Ruth comprehended her meaning, and went on chatting.

"How do you like the village?" inquired Mabel.

"I have not seen enough of it just yet to know."

"But you saw something of it this morning. I thought some of the streets very beautiful, especially the one we passed through on leaving this. Did you not see how completely it was arched by the trees? The residences were fine,

too. With your taste, I don't see how you could fail to notice this beauty."

"I was too much absorbed in Miss Allaire and thinking what words to put my thoughts in to see the streets."

There were constantly new arrivals, and it was a busy morning to all but themselves. Miss Allaire and one or two others called at their room, expressing sympathy and offering any assistance in their power, and as they spoke in English it was very pleasant. Dinner came, and with it French again.

At half-past one the examinations began, in which Mabel and Ruth became distinguished for scholarship, surprising even Miss Soulie with their knowledge of French, and being pronounced wanting only in ability to speak the language and in correctness of pronunciation.

The number at the tables increased. Every room was filled, and twice each day, when the weather would permit, they walked through the streets in a long, orderly procession, attended by teachers. The first Sabbath was rainy, but there were no excuses granted to remain at home on that account. Having been classified according to the Church to which they or their parents be-

longed, they were escorted to the house of God by the appropriate officials, and seated together in a space set apart for them. Mabel and Miss Winchester, Ruth and Rose Allaire, still walked together. Mabel had almost hoped to find these other young ladies attending another church, so that she might walk with Ruth, which would seem more home-like; besides, Miss Winchester did not please her. She was evidently a fine scholar, but unprepossessing in appearance and with few associates in the school, though this was her third year. It was not flattering to be placed with such a person, and Ruth, who was quite inclined to resent it for her friend, tried to persuade Mabel to go to the teachers and ask for a change.

"Don't, Ruth," Mabel had said; "you would feel sad to see the poor creature going alone, and I may as well accompany her as any one."

"But she might be different. She would have friends if she were like other people."

"Perhaps she could not be like other people. It isn't always possible for us to be as we should like, and her character may have an interesting side which she is hiding. No, Ruth, I will be her friend instead of trying to escape her. I profess to be a follower of One who pleased not

himself, and yet who did please himself by being a friend to the friendless."

"I wish you joy in carrying out your resolution."

"Thank you. I am sure I shall find pleasure in so doing."

Mabel, knowing that Ruth scorned prayer, knelt long in silent petition before going to church. She was going to a house of worship new to her, yet it should be home, her Father's house, filled with brothers and sisters, not strangers. She was praying that she might feel this. With a calm joy filling her soul, she placed herself under the umbrella beside Miss Winchester, and as they set out dared to ask her if she were a member of the church.

"No," was the sad answer.

"Do you think that you love Jesus?"

"You ask me that question because you are my friend," replied Miss Winchester, eagerly seizing Mabel's hand. "I thought from the first I might trust you, and you won't care if I do?"

"Won't care? I shall be glad to have you feel that you can—so glad! Do let me be your friend."

"I will, and yet you are a stranger. I have

not trusted any one so much for years. But I am tired of having no one to love me, no one to love; and if I am deceived, it will be merely a repetition of the old lesson."

Mabel waited, questioning with her eyes.

"I have not answered you. Can you have sympathy with one who does not know, who doubts and hopes, believes and despairs, who has none to aid her, who catches only a glimpse of light once in a while, and then it is gone?"

"A true Christian should have sympathy with every form of suffering, be it what he feels or not. If you have described your own condition, I am sorry for you. Can I help you?"

"I don't know as I have hardly any idea of what I need."

"But you do not know whether you love the Saviour or not?"

"No."

"The Bible gives us a criterion: 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren,' Christ's disciples. You were glad when I spoke of him, and that assures me that you do love him."

"But I am not sure of any affection for his children—not sure that I love any one."

"You do, I know you do, and the Saviour too, else you would not have been so glad to hear his name."

"Your words give me hope, but there is need of something more. 'If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' There are those whom I cannot forgive. I have tried to turn away from the wrong and forget it, but it is of no use."

"Don't say it is of no use, for that cannot be. When the hateful sight comes, can you not turn to the cross and see its victim dying, and hear him say, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?' You cannot have had such enemies as his."

Their nearness to the church here put an end to the conversation, and after the service they walked home in silence. There was no occasion to go out again that day, there being Bible-classes in the afternoon and in the evening preaching in the chapel. On the way to their rooms after the evening service, Miss Winchester whispered to Mabel:

"There will be a prayer-meeting in the course of the week—perhaps two."



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRAYER-MEETING.

THE first prayer-meeting of the term was held on the evening of the first Wednesday, when all who desired were excused from their rooms to attend. Ruth declined to go. Nearly forty were present, and Mabel thought if there were so many Christians in that family, they ought to be very happy together, journeying toward the better country, and that they might render valuable assistance to each other by comparing notes of travel, pointing out the dangers they had found in the road, the safe resting-places, while the strong should help on the weak. But if it were so, it would be different from the Christian community she had lived in, where people seemed to think there was danger of speaking too often of the celestial city, the narrow way by which it is reached, and Him who

has gone on before to show the way and prepare mansions of rest. Yet few feared to speak too much of the means by which physical wants are supplied, or of the imaginary treasures heaped up here. She was herself guilty in this respect, yet was conscious that her desire to do better was too weak.

Miss Littlefield, the teacher who visited them on their first evening in the seminary, led the meeting, opening it by prayer and singing and reading the first sixteen verses of the fifth chapter of Matthew. Then going back to the fourteenth verse, she read again, "Ye are the light of the world," and said:

"This passage is addressed to believers, and it is fitting that we should dwell upon it at this time.

"Night has come, sending its black shadows into every room in our building, yet we do not have to grope our way from one place to another, for lamps are lighted everywhere, enabling us to see our way with ease.

"There is a large number of students here, of whom more than two-thirds have remained away from our meeting, leading us to infer that they are in darkness, for those into whose souls Christ

has entered with illuminating power generally hasten gladly to the place of prayer. A goodly number also have come hither, the most of whom—as we may suppose—are Christians. To us then are these words addressed. We are to be the light of this little school-world of ours, the lamps in the building by whose radiance others may find their way. You are to shine, I am to shine, each with a flame lighted by God and varying in brilliancy according to our supply of Christian graces, the faithfulness with which we feed the flame.

“We are at the beginning of a term which will be quickly spent, and should make ourselves known as Christians at once, not allowing those with whom we are associated to be surprised by and by when they learn that we are professors of religion. We should take a stand so high as to be readily distinguished by our daily life from those who do not bear this holy name. We should let our light so shine before our fellow-students that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. What if the lamps go out or are hidden? How shall we find our way? So many of us ought to be a force sufficient under God to bring about the conversion of every wanderer of our number. Shall

we try to do this? And if the term shall end without any considerable portion of them being brought to the Saviour, shall we not have reason to feel the fault in a great measure our own?

"But *how* shall we let our light shine? How may a school-girl work for Jesus? To consider some of the ways may help us to act and watch more intelligently.

"We may do this by diligence; by being cheerful under all trials and discouragements, as we well may be, with God for our helper; in yielding a generous and prompt obedience to the laws by which we are to govern ourselves here, which may sometimes seem hard and unnecessary in individual cases, but which the general good demands, keeping them as faithfully when there is none to censure or applaud as when under the eye of a monitor; by being patient and forgiving under reproach and injuries, careful of the feelings and reputation of others, not yielding to the temptation to build ourselves up at another's expense.

"Perhaps you have an unconverted roommate. Take upon yourself your full share of the work to be done in your room, and if you do a little more, be careful to make it no merit.

Avoid all pharisaical demonstrations, yet do not be ashamed to kneel in prayer before her when you have no other place. Show her that you reverence the Bible and prize it more than all other books ; speak of Jesus as your best Friend, and invite her to share his friendship. You have a divine commission to invite her and all others. 'Let him that heareth say, Come.' Let it be seen, whenever occasion requires, that any irreverence toward God or sacred things is painful to you. Bring as many as you can to the place of prayer ; and, finally, 'whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' This is the fruit you must bear if you abide in the true Vine, of which you are branches.

"Thus shall we best proclaim abroad
The honors of our Saviour God ;
When his salvation reigns within,
And grace subdues the power of sin.' "

After these remarks the time was occupied by the students in singing, prayer or speaking. Mabel bore her part, being eager to take that stand for Jesus of which her teacher had spoken, and Miss Winchester rose to request prayers in her behalf.

"Were there any present who took no part in

the meeting?" Ruth asked, when Mabel had returned.

"Oh yes. There was not time for all."

"I should have gone if I had not been afraid of being the only looker-on. I think my curiosity will tempt me down on Saturday evening."

"I hope it will, and one reason is, I want you to know Miss Littlefield."

"Yes, she was there of course, the dear little woman! I've no objection to knowing all that is possible of her, but Miss Jackson, Miss Peck and Miss Taylor—bah! I'm thankful I don't have anything to do with them."

"They seem to suffer somewhat in comparison with Miss Littlefield, but I think we should like them better if we knew them well."

"But how is one to climb to the height of their superb dignities, or, having accomplished that miracle, to dare take a peep under the purple to find their souls? Miss Littlefield knows her position, and every one is willing to acknowledge her right there, for she is its ornament, but she has no idea that her body is made of finer clay or purer blood than the poorest of her pupils."

"What makes her so, Ruth?"

"She is a lady."

"Is that all? If you had seen and heard her this evening, you would have discovered another source of excellence to which she is no stranger. Her perfect sincerity and earnestness impressed me more than her words, and, thinking of your comment on the first evening, I knew her beauty would never fade, her song never cease."

On Saturday evening Ruth and Mabel went to the meeting together. Miss Winchester took a seat by the side of the latter, and Miss Littlefield again led, reading the third chapter of First Corinthians, and, speaking of the foundation laid for our faith, Jesus Christ, asked how they were building thereon. Gold, silver, precious stones, were all at their command, and though the labor of building therewith might be greater, would they forsake them for wood, hay, stubble, rearing an unsightly edifice, to prove worthless in the time of its trial by fire? They were God's temples, wonderful palaces built for him, where either he had entered to abide or was at the door seeking admittance. Was there room for him? Was the temple clean?

"Let us admit him now," she said, "for we can never make our souls clean enough for him to dwell in until his light shows their impurity

and foulness and the flame of his love burns it all away."

As the meeting went on, Miss Winchester rose to say that at last she had begun to know something of the love of Christ, through gazing at the cross which a friend, a stranger, pointed out to her. For a few days it had been constantly before her eyes, a vision of tenderness unequalled.

"I have seen," she said,

"From his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

"I do like Miss Littlefield," was Ruth's first comment on the meeting.

"I hope she will not be the only one whom you will learn to love in these meetings."

"Mabel, don't talk to me in that way, or I shall stay away. I am glad you have helped poor Miss Winchester. The girls are all talking of the change in her, and think you must have wrought it. They say she is trying to get acquainted and be like other people, and her room-mate is beginning to like her. She must have been under the charm of a wicked spirit,

and you found words to break the spell. I begin to think you are a wonderful being, Mabelle."

"You will not let me reply, Ruth, but it is needless; your own heart can do it better."





CHAPTER XIX.

IS THIS THE DAWN?

THE days were passing pleasantly away, being too full of occupation for time to hang heavily upon the hands of the young ladies. The walks, at first so tiresome and formal, came at length to be looked forward to with interest. Ruth and Rose were always glad to be together, and Mabel was constantly receiving some new revelation of the strange Miss Winchester, whom now she was beginning to call Mary. The prayer-meetings increased in interest and numbers. Ruth and Rose attended them constantly, and Mabel thought she could discover in her room-mate signs of relenting and tenderness of heart. Upon herself the words of Miss Littlefield had not been lost. Feeling the necessity of Christian activity, she was leading no idle life, but forgetting the things behind, she pressed "toward the mark for the

prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," not ostentatiously, but quietly and earnestly, making known the depth and purity of her religious life by unruffled sweetness of manner, sympathy for the unfortunate, unselfishness, and loving words spoken for her Saviour. She became a favorite with teachers and pupils, and instead of being elated, sometimes feared she should fail of a blessing because all seemed to speak so well of her; not daring to take to herself the promises, "Blessed are the meek"—"they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness"—"the merciful"—"the pure in heart"—"the peace makers."

"Mabel," said Ruth, "is a river, sometimes hidden by the more showy people who stand beside her, but whose presence can be detected by the freshness which follows her wherever she glides."

When the two girls contemplated going to school together and occupying the same room, each had fears lest in that constant intercourse she should discover something in the other to weaken her love and destroy their mutual faith. But whatever faults Mabel had discovered in her friend had been overlooked with such perfect

kindness as to cause no discord, while Ruth, more and more charmed, began to regard Mabel with feelings akin to worship.

"You are beautiful," she would sometimes say, mentally adding, "Piety is an ornament to her;" and then correct herself by thinking, "No, it is her nature."

Ruth had formed an ardent attachment for Miss Allaire, who was far more entertaining than Mabel and pleased her fancy, but this love was widely different from that she bore to Mabel.

A soiree was announced, when the professors of the college, the clergymen of the place and the trustees of the seminary were invited to spend an evening with the young ladies. This caused no little excitement in the school, and for many days few things were talked of which had not some connection with the party. The evening came, and at an early hour a goodly number of intelligent people had gathered in the pleasant chapel, the parlors being too small for so large a company. Frank Hope was there, and nearly all the college students whose sisters were in the school, Hubert Allaire, the brother of Rose, and many gentlemen and ladies of high standing in the town.

When Ruth and Mabel were dressed for the evening, the latter dropped quietly upon her knees for a moment, having made it a rule to visit no place where she could not ask her heavenly Father to accompany her.

"How foolish!" thought Ruth, who, knowing that Rose awaited them, was impatient.

But when Mabel rose, her face was so serene and bright that her room-mate could not refrain from going to the mirror to see if she could find any such expression in her own. She found bright eyes, faultless features and complexion, smiled to see if smiles were becoming, and then smiled again at what she had done. Her beauty was gratifying, yet there was a sweet something in her friend's plain face which she coveted.

Mabel, somewhat amused, was watching her.

"You think me vain," said Ruth. "Perhaps I am, but surely not as you imagine. You would not guess that my thoughts just now were very flattering to you, so don't guess at all."

Rose was ready, and they were almost the last to go in. Frank had been awaiting them with some impatience, and Rose Allaire eagerly introduced her brother, a tall, fine-looking young man, who seemed in all respects a gentleman. Our

friends soon made new acquaintances, and found that some of the more elderly people present knew their parents. Ruth, who had been previously notified that she would be called on to play and sing, was thoroughly prepared, and her execution, even better than usual, elicited much praise. When the appointed hour arrived, there was sacred music and prayer, after which the visitors went home, and the girls to their rooms.

One more gathering of the kind was to be held during the term and another at the end, and the new students began to look upon the place and its people with interest.

"Ruth," said Rose, one day, "I have half a mind not to attend another of these prayer-meetings."

"Why, Rose?"

"They don't make me feel comfortable at all. They cause me to think I ought to be what I am not and what I have no disposition to be. I have been there too much already, for now I don't feel right if I stay away. Don't they trouble you?"

"Very little. I believe I am proof against such influences."

"No, Ruth, oh no!" and Rose shook her head

as though that were a very bad thing. "Your father is a clergyman and has taught you a great deal. Please be good and tell me what to do."

"I cannot tell you anything."

"Oh, it must be that you can!"

"No; my father is religious, but that does not make me so. I have a mind of my own."

"But aren't you afraid? Suppose you should be very sick and the doctor should say you could not get well? Or suppose this house should take fire in the night and we could not get down? Where would you go?"

"I don't know. No one knows, and so I will not think about it."

"Oh, Ruth! I am so disappointed. I thought you could help me."

These words came home to the heart of Ruth. She saw that there was too much truth in her remark that she was proof against such influences. That which would make others weep had no effect upon her; and remembering that some are said to be given over to hardness of heart and blindness of mind, she wondered if she had reached that state. As Mabel had suspected, some of her pet theories were crumbling away, and she could hardly recognize them as the same

that were revolved and admired in the "Pleasant Evenings." Truths sometimes flashed upon her which made her feel them absurd. Should she try to patch them up and cling there, or look elsewhere for support? Could she love the God who had placed her in such danger as Rose had portrayed? What could she say? Then came a thought of Lizzie.

"Aren't you going to speak to me again, Ruth? You do know. What shall I do?"

"Continue to attend the meetings and do not resist their influence."

"That isn't very satisfying. Will that save me if I die?"

"Go and talk with Mabel. She can tell you everything."

Rose sprang up.

"Will you go with me?"

"I? And now?"

"Yes, you, and now! I am worried and don't want to postpone the matter, and if she can tell me anything which I ought to know and you are ignorant of, you should hear it too."

"You logic is irresistible. Yes, I will go."

"And tell her what we have come for? You know her better than I do."

"That is more than I promised."

"But you will, please? It will be a very great favor, and surely you will not care."

They found Mabel alone in her room, and seating themselves on the floor at her feet, each took one of her hands.

"We are two little children come to you for instruction," said Ruth.

"You have come to a learner. Wherein am I wiser than you?"

"In that science whereof I forbade you to speak to me long ago."

"Are you in earnest, Ruth? You know already more than I can tell you. Go and sit at the feet of your best Friend and you shall be fully taught."

"But tell us," said Rose, "how to go there. Tell me how to do willingly what I don't want to do—how to like what I hate and hate what I like."

"That is for those who receive the new heart, Rosie."

"But how can I get a new heart?"

"By asking for it in earnest."

"But what if it is held out to me and I am unwilling to receive it?"

"That, I fear, has long been just your case. If

God offers to you his favor and the renewing of your heart, and you will not have it, then no other being can help you. God will not *make* you accept forgiveness against your will. He offers it to you freely. Will you not have it?"

"But how am I to get it?"

"You already know, Rose, that you are a sinner, an offender, and so condemned. Now, pardon is ready and is proffered to you. As a little child believes its father, so believe your Father and take him at his word. Begin to trust him, to obey him, to live a Christian life. You need not wait, but now can trust the Saviour and begin the new life. Go to the cross and learn anew what was done for you there. If that does not win you, I am afraid nothing can."

Mabel had no more to say, and the two, with arms about each other, walked up and down the hall, speaking, as was required, in tones scarce above a whisper.

"Mabel knows all about it," said Rose; "she could preach."

"Yes; she is always thinking of such things, and it would not be easy to exhaust her treasury. She seems to have a genius for religion."

"What do you mean, Ruth?"

"Don't you know some people are naturally more religious than others? She is one of that class."

"But is it pleasant to be one of that class? I don't like people to be too religious, they say such disagreeable things."

"She is an exception. She says a good deal, but you can see that her heart is so full of the matter that it cannot help bubbling up to her lips and spilling over so. Mabel is always sweet and good, seldom disagreeable."

The striking of a bell sent them back to their rooms.

"We must think of it," said Ruth, at parting.

But every moment was filled. How could they think of that and study too? It must be postponed.

The next week ended the term, and the day closed with a soiree. Ruth was walking with Frank Hope, who had heard through Mabel of the request she and Rose had made, and was anxious to hear some word from her to confirm his hope. She guessed as much, and seemed somewhat annoyed. On reference being made by him to the anticipated pleasures of the vacation which they were soon to enjoy, she said:

"I am not sure that I shall go home."

"Not sure?"

Ruth laughed. "One would think that you were frightened."

"But what do you mean? You surely are not in earnest."

"I surely am. Rose wrote a letter to father some time ago, begging him to allow me to spend my vacation with her in Albany, which I am very anxious to do. He has not given his answer; there she is, talking with him now. I am almost sure of her success, for her pleading is irresistible. Her brother is to be there, and I think we shall have a delightful time if I can go. Do you know him, Frank?"

"We have only a speaking acquaintance. I don't like him."

"Now, Frank, that is cruel! It transcends even brotherly freedom to tell me so, when you know that he is the brother of one of my dearest friends, and that I like him very much."

"Then I suppose I ought to be sorry, but it is true, nevertheless. I know nothing of Miss Allaire except that she is pleasing and you and Mabel like her, which is a great recommendation. But though I can hardly tell why, I should not

want my sister to go home with them. I hope you will not."

"What can have given you such a prejudice against people of whom you know so little? What have you heard against them?"

"Do not say *them*, for the young lady impresses me favorably. It is only the brother, and against him I have never heard a disparaging word. I know he is a young lawyer, very talented, who ranks high and wields a strong influence, which I am persuaded is not good, and that is why I dread to have you go. Now tell me that you will not."

"You unreasonable boy! Think how far I have gone, and judge if now, with my father's consent, I could well excuse myself to Rose. Have you found me so extremely pliable as to be turned about by whatever wind happens to blow on me?"

"I still wish that you might not go, for I believe you go at your peril."

"You are very kind to warn me thus, but, according to your own confession, you are prejudiced. I wish my friends could trust me more, but if you have anxieties, console yourself with the consideration that to be forewarned is to be

forearmed. Now please take me to my father and Rose."

He did so, and excusing himself, left them to talk over the matter. It was decided. Frank saw it, and saw Rose lead Ruth away in proud and happy triumph, saying, "We have prevailed."





CHAPTER XX.

FRIENDS NEW AND OLD.

RUTH, from her earliest years, had known repinings at the absence of those luxuries which either her father's purse was too scanty to buy or of which he denied himself in order that the price of them might go to relieve human suffering. These privations were felt still more keenly as she grew older, and on entering the Allaire mansion, the thirst for wealth sprang up anew. So elegant did everything appear in her eyes that she was greatly surprised to hear Rose speak of some of the appointments as ugly, and go on to tell what she wanted in place of them, adding, "But papa thinks he cannot afford to gratify me yet."

Was it possible that Rose, with such abundant resources, had as many unsatisfied desires as herself and was really no richer?

Rose was the pet of her family, the music, beauty and fragrance of the house. Evidently it was grand and lonely in her absence, in her presence charming and full of life. Her influence was felt upon things as well as upon persons.

"I try to study disorder for effect," said her mother, "but our little girl has no need to study; she is no sooner here than things appear in unexpected places and assume positions that you feel they have no right to take, but which you cannot help liking. When she goes away I try to keep everything as she left it, but it is impossible; no touch is like hers, and she returns to find us prim as ever."

"Rose, you should live in a parsonage in a country village a while," said Ruth.

"Oh, that would be charming, I am sure!—everything so fresh and simple! We have to be stylish here, and style is so wearisome! How happy you are to live in the country! I am going home with you some day, you know."

Mr. and Mrs. Allaire, who had received Ruth cordially for their daughter's sake, as the acquaintance progressed seemed to be greatly pleased, and bestowed upon her many attentions. Hubert Allaire was simply gentlemanly, a little

too reserved the young lady thought—certainly not too attentive; what harm could ever come to her through his influence? or what harm to any one from him who was so near her ideal of manly dignity and grace? How kind he was! how intelligent! His sister was proud of him, and would often introduce into the conversation topics upon which she knew he was fond of talking that Ruth might enjoy the pleasure of hearing him. But so shy did he appear to be of these snares that she rarely succeeded, and when she did, his mother and the two girls would listen for an hour or more without wishing to say anything themselves, except sometimes to ask a question for the purpose of leading him farther. There was perfect courtesy toward his listeners; he gave them credit for knowing so much that Ruth felt half afraid to ask a question lest he should be astonished at her ignorance. But no such feeling was apparent. The second time Rose had drawn him out in this manner he concluded by saying,

“You have discovered one of my great failings, Miss Hawthorne; I am a talker, and my mother and sister do not help me much in my efforts to reform. I really did not mean to inflict upon

you such a discourse, and I most humbly beg your pardon."

There was entire deference on his part to his mother's wishes; he petted Rose and would grant anything she asked.

The two showed Ruth the city with its wonders, taking her to concerts and lectures, but making not the slightest reference to attendance at any place where it was considered improper for a Christian to go. At church the young man was reverent, and he spoke reverently of sacred things at home.

"Is your brother a professor of religion, Rose?" said Ruth.

"No, but he respects religion very much. I have been telling him to-day that I wanted to be a Christian."

"What did he say?"

"'By all means, Rosie, be one if you choose, only continue to be my sweet little sister, and don't be a fanatic.' You see he doesn't like people who are always preaching—women at least, I don't mean clergymen—and running around on foolish errands; he likes sensible, refined Christians. I'm going to be just such a one if I can, but I don't get along very fast. I

try to go to the cross, as Mabel said, but in some way it disappears before I get there. I mean though to keep going and praying. You know, or perhaps you don't know, that papa and mamma are queer about such things, and never refer to them at all, and I have a feeling that they'd rather I wouldn't have anything to do with religion till I'm older. But how do I know that I shall be older? maybe I'll die, and so I'm going to keep on trying. But you, Ruth, have you found the cross?"

"Rosie, I had almost forgotten it. There was no time to think, so near the close of the term, and here I find so much to see and am so happy with you all that I am quite satisfied."

Rose's face brightened.

"Oh, are you happy here? I am so glad! Do you like papa and mamma and Hubert?"

"Very much."

"I knew you would. That is, I do. And they love you too. Hubert said this morning that you were beautiful."

Ruth blushed.

"You had to coax a long time to get that, I know. Confess, little flower."

"Well, yes, a *little*; but he wouldn't have said

it if he hadn't thought so. I know he likes you."

"Yes, passably well."

"No, very much."

"Only your loving eyes can see that, and I almost dare to contradict you since I cannot avoid coming to a different conclusion." Ruth was sincere, though wishing to think otherwise.

When she returned to Dayton it was with hopes and fears widely different from those with which she first entered school.

She was glad, indeed, to meet Mabel and Frank, who looked fresher by their rest, but, though rejecting the thought as traitorous to so old a friendship, could not help feeling that they were somewhat countrified in appearance. Yet it was good to look into their faces. What a quantity of packages and letters they had brought her from home, where evidently she was not forgotten! She had already learned something of the disappointment of the little ones when her father returned without her, and now pictured to herself the scene on the day previous to Mabel's coming, when each member of the little group in the parsonage was preparing something to send to Ruth. Was she worthy of such love?

How desolate should we be if the love we receive were measured by our worthiness! Then the sunshine and rain, failing to fall upon the unjust, would be scanty in the earth, and our heavenly Father would not keep his ceaseless watch over us for good. Would the Saviour have died?

First Ruth took up the little letter from Channing, whose hand his brother had guided to write the words his mouth had spoken for Woodie. Lillian, who had dictated hers to the same scribe, said it was the longest time she ever saw in her life since Ruth went away, and she was getting real big and tall. Her sister would not know her, and unless she hurried back pretty soon, would take her for some other little girl, for now she could talk plain, just like a lady. She had a beautiful new cloak, the prettiest little hat with a feather, which Woodie might see if she would come home. Her mamma said they would do very well, but wanted her to have more and better ornaments than these—some that would not grow old, and which she could wear in heaven.

Mark's epistle was dignified, beginning with: "As Mabel is going back to-morrow, I now sit down to write a few lines to you." Then followed the news of the village, much about the Sabbath-

school and church affairs, and the intelligence that he expected to have some new skates. He was glad that she went to prayer-meeting and was trying to love the Saviour. He should pray for her every day.

"The little old man!" said Ruth, with tears in her eyes. "He will make a farmer and a deacon in spite of his old fire and fun, which I hope have not all been driven out of the child by his religion."

The letter from father and mother was after the old sort, full of tender solicitude, and all together left her thinking of little else than home.

"You must tell me everything, Mabel. Did you see Aunt Jennie?"

"Could I come away without it? And so many good things she said for you I can't tell you half. She is more feeble than ever this cold weather, and it seemed to me sweeter than ever to hear her talk. As her body wastes away her spirit appears to grow, and I could not help thinking, old and helpless as she is, that she belonged to that class who shall renew their strength, mount up on wings as eagles, run and not be weary, walk and not faint."

"And what of Noel?"

"He is the same strange boy, showing little improvement;" and, after going on to tell some of his queer freaks, which made Ruth laugh heartily, Mabel added, "Still I have faith that he will grow to be a man of character yet."

"When his spasms of effort have worn themselves out, perhaps, but what will be left? I see nothing else hopeful about him."

"There is Miss Littlefield in the hall. I hope she is coming here," said Mabel, opening the door.

"I heard you had returned and made haste to come," said the teacher, after the greetings were over. "I want to tell you the result of an investigation I have been making. Have you time to hear it now?"

"We have always time to listen to you, Miss Littlefield," said Ruth, to which remark Mabel added pleasant words, and the lady went on:

"You will be interested, for it is about poor Mary Winchester, whose history I have learned after a good deal of effort. She would never have revealed it herself. Her home was in Manchester, where her parents died, leaving her, an only child, young and timid, to the care of her guardian. His wife was her nearest relative, and

had a daughter by a former marriage to whom the property was to revert in case of Mary's death. Perhaps I ought to have said before that Mr. Winchester left ample means for his daughter's support and education. Some officious friend told this girl of such a provision in the will, after which she began to hate Mary, regarding her as standing between herself and good fortune, and to persecute her in all possible ways, such as giving her an ill name among her mates, hiding her rubbers and umbrella at school, thus obliging her to walk a long way in the rain unprotected, and then managing to keep her away from the fire at home, or prevent her putting on dry clothing, and in many other ways contriving to impair her health. She also succeeded in creating a dislike for her on the part of her mother, who, it appears; was not a woman of much mind, and the poor orphan, made as wretched as she could well be, learned to distrust every one.

"At fifteen she had diphtheria, which left her with the bad throat and voice, weak eyes and stiff joints, which afflict her now. These physical disabilities, added to her timidity and disrelish for society, and being more distrustful than ever of her ability to win friends, she came to regard

herself as born to be hated and all about her as enemies. One lady, who had been watching her, had the rare tact to espouse her cause successfully, and succeeded in having her sent here."

"May I ask who it was, Miss Littlefield?" said Mabel.

"Miss Annie McMinn, a stranger to me, but I shall remember her name."

"Ruth's mother!" said Mabel.

"My stepmother, Miss Littlefield."

"Then I may congratulate you upon having a good one. I think I should like to know her."

Ruth bowed slightly and stammered out a belief that the acquaintance would be mutually agreeable.

"She inquired about Miss Winchester when I was at home," said Mabel, "and expressed a good deal of interest in her, saying that she had a sad history, but she had no opportunity to tell me more."

"But for this lack of symmetry, caused by cruel treatment, Mary would have a fine mind. She is a superior scholar."

"But don't you think," said Ruth, "she will grow symmetrical now that she has opened her heart to friends and sunshine?"

"Yes, in a degree; but in this world it is impossible for her to be what she might have been had she been properly trained in childhood."

"What will she do when she has graduated?" inquired Mabel.

"I don't know. She wants to teach, but I am afraid she would fail if she were to undertake it. I cannot bear the thought of her going back to the house of her guardian."

"Providence may find a place for her."

"True, Mabel, and we may always trust, but it is sometimes our duty to do also."

The next day Frank came again, and this time they talked of Ruth's visit, when she enthusiastically undertook to give them an idea of the many pleasures she had enjoyed.

"Frank, you must become better acquainted with Miss Allaire and her brother, for they are most delightful friends. You said I was going at my peril, but as for the influence of the young man, I think he tried not to have any over me, and if he had, it was only a good one, that would urge me to press on to higher attainments. I am very glad I went. One has to go among people of greater culture to see how ignorant and rude one is."

"Were *all* your good resolutions stronger when you came back than when you went?"

Ruth hesitated and colored slightly :

"I think so ; and if they were not, it was not because of any opposing influence there."

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CHAPTER XXI.

PLUCKING OUT THE EYE.

ANOTHER term was flying rapidly by, and the little dingy room had become dear to its occupants. The routine of school, so frequently called dull, had much of variety, owing to the number of persons employed and the many subjects brought up for consideration, and our young ladies were not forced to find pleasure and instruction within the walls of the seminary only, there being a course of lectures and a few fine concerts to which Frank by permission usually took his sister and Ruth.

"I don't see why we can't have you part of the time," said Rose, who also went with her brother.

Ruth wished they could, for she had lost none of her admiration for Mr. Hubert Allaire, and since the opening of the term had not met him

except at the two soirees, when he had been politely attentive. In the week preceding the one on which the term was to close she received through the proper authorities an invitation to attend a concert with Mr. Allaire and his sister. It was accepted, and Frank and Mabel were disappointed.

"I have a feeling," said the latter, "that Ruth is going away from us."

"So have I, and I fear she will lose as well as we."

"I once thought"—Mabel hesitated—"I once fondly dreamed that she would one day be my sister."

Never before had they spoken of this, and silence fell for a moment between them. Then the young man said:

"I too have had dreams and a struggle, but they are over I believe. Fair, intelligent and sweet-tempered as she is, I would not dare to ask her to be my wife, if I were sure she would consent, which I greatly doubt. It would not be right for me to do so.

"You remember the covenant you and I have made to live as humble Christians, consecrated in body and soul, property and influence, to the ser-

vice of our Lord and Redeemer until removed by death. In trying to do this I find it a necessity to cast away as far as possible all that hinders me in the race. How then could I place myself under a strong influence which would tend to blind my eyes to duty and lead me to forget my vows? This is what I should do in seeking to bring about that to which you refer. It would be one of the surest ways of quenching the Spirit, it seems to me."

"But your influence would be powerful over her. You might save her."

"Oh, Mabel, what would I not do to do that! Of course if I could win her my influence would be much stronger than it now is, but would I have grounds for hope that it would be more powerful than all the combined forces that have been urging, almost lifting her up to the Saviour from childhood? That would be assuming too much. Never did one sin against greater light than she.

"Besides, in true marriage there is sympathy in all the great aims of life. If husband and wife cannot speak their thoughts and feelings freely to each other, they are twain and not one. Could I talk with her thus of what interests me

most? Ruth is beautiful and dear to me, and if she had chosen the good part, I should strive most zealously to win her. But a Christian cannot take such a step prayerlessly, and how can I pray, 'Lead me not into temptation,' and yet place myself under the strongest incitements to depart from God?"

"Have you," said Mabel, desirous of changing a subject which was painful to both, "given up all thought of entering the ministry?"

"Are you going to be sorry if I have? I should be sorry to have my sister disappointed in me, and forced to think me weak and vacillating."

"I am sure I never shall think that unless you forfeit all the promises your life has made thus far. I have wanted you to be a minister, Frank, but of course you must choose for yourself, and I am not so conceited as to regard my judgment superior to yours in such a matter. But tell me all about it, that's a good brother."

"Why, my dear sister, I don't need to be coaxed to tell you."

"Well—"

"In my first ardor, I did desire to do so as much as you can possibly wish to have me, be-

cause it seemed the most blessed occupation in the world. But you know father."

"He wouldn't object, Frank."

"No, great as the sacrifice would be to him, and it would be greater than you think. He is growing old, and not another of the family can come to his aid as I can."

"Frank, that seems to me little cause for declining to enter upon so great a work. He could sell his property and go to live with you, or me if I should be anywhere here."

"It would almost break his heart to see his estate pass into other hands, but if he were convinced that in parting with it he would do more for the glory of God than in any other way, he would not hesitate. I do not believe that is required of him. I hope I should do some good as a preacher of the gospel, but a desire to undertake the work is by no means the only requisite. The ministry demands peculiar talents, which I do not believe I have; but God *has* fitted me for another kind of labor, wherein I believe I can glorify him more fully, because he has called me there. So my sister must be content to see me the staff for my father to lean on, a worker in a private way."

"Perhaps, Frank, you are right, and that ambition rather than love for the good cause has made me so anxious to see you in the pulpit. I thought that we should all be proud to have you there."

"I do not think in that capacity I could make my friends proud, if it were desirable, but I do hope to prove a source of gratification and thankfulness to them in my legitimate province."

"I wonder if my dream for myself will also fade away."

"What dream, Mabel?"

"One which I have concealed from those who love me best, through fear of giving unnecessary pain; but the desire to make it a reality grows stronger every day. If I tell you, will you promise not to oppose me to-night, but to wait until you have thought it over?"

"Yes, if future opposition will not be too late."

"Well, then, I want to be a missionary."

"To your Sabbath-school class and all around you who are needy?"

"Yes, until I go across the seas."

"My promise shall be kept," said Frank, after a brief interval of silence, "but think if I, who

have renounced one of the two dearest to me, can afford to give up the other."

"You can, my brother, for 'there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.'"

"Bless you, Mabel!"

"Rather bless Jesus, who left you the promise."

When they had returned, Ruth was in the highest spirits, and praised the concert, not indiscriminately, but without her usual calmness, quoting largely from Mr. Allaire. Mabel could not refrain from a quiet smile.

"What are you laughing at, you placid, provoking creature?"

"Not laughing, was I? It would be unsympathetic to hear one go on with such animation and delight and express no pleasure."

"That's not it, Ma-belle. I amuse you, and you think me wonderfully taken up with my friends. I admit that I am, and you would be as much pleased with them as I if you knew them

as well. You do know what a dear little creature Rosie is, and her brother is as much above ordinary men as—as— But I can think of no fit comparison. He will make his mark in the world. His name will be heard, unless excessive modesty keep him in the background."

Mabel continued to smile.

"You think, too, your humble Ruth feels flattered. That charge, also, she will attempt neither to palliate nor deny. She was pleased with her invitation, and how could she help it? It is delightful to listen to the conversation of one so gifted and well-informed as Mr. Hubert Allaire; and then it's dull always going with one's brother. Oh, forgive me, dear! I didn't mean to call it dull going with you and Frank. You know I love you both, and indeed I do feel grateful for your kindness, and enjoy being with you so much! Don't take it in that bad way, darling, don't!"

Mabel saw tears brighten those beautiful eyes, and kissed the cheek that was held up for her seal of forgiveness.

"How is Frank to-night? Well and happy?"

"I think so, only we were both disappointed in not having your company. I don't wonder

the Allaires wanted you, but don't give them our places in your heart."

"They shall not have them. Nobody shall."

It was a great pleasure to Ruth that her father was to deliver an address before one of the literary societies at the close of the term. It was given the evening before the last, and, as it was received with much favor, she felt no small degree of pride in finding herself several times pointed out the next day as the daughter of the lecturer, and to hear it whispered that there was talk of giving him a call to one of the churches in Dayton.

"How proud you must be of your father!" said Rose. "His lecture was magnificent. Hubert liked it so much."

Ruth was satisfied.

At the closing soirée the clergyman again met Mr. Allaire, who said that business would take him through Hopeton some time within the next two weeks, and if not too much hurried he would be glad, with Mr. Hawthorne's permission, to call upon him and his family, with whom he had formed an acquaintance so pleasant. Mr. Hawthorne, though somewhat surprised, could not withhold the invitation.



CHAPTER XXII.

VACATION AT HOME.

AGAIN Ruth was at home, finding it a dear place after so long an absence. The hatred she had felt toward her stepmother was covered by new happinesses, and she returned her tender greeting cordially. While yet in the hall she heard a shouting in the sitting-room.

"Oh, Channy! Woodie! Woodie's come!"

"The dear little sister hasn't forgotten my name."

"No one forgets it here," said Mrs. Hawthorne.

On came Lily with Channing clinging to her dress.

"We've got a s'prise for you. We've got a s'prise."

"Ittie bruver," shouted Channing.

"You are a surprise yourselves, dear little things; how you have both grown!" and clasping

them together in her arms Ruth kissed them repeatedly.

"Come," said Lily, seizing a hand. "Channy, don't you tell. Take hold of her other hand."

"Ittie bruver," repeated the little fellow as they moved toward the bed-room.

There, asleep and softly covered in its cradle, was a baby boy, whose days since, according to Wordsworth, he began to sleep and to forget, were somewhere about fifty-six.

"Isn't he pretty?" said Lilian.

"Booful baby bruver," responded Channing.

"Kiss him, Woodie," said Lily.

"Woodie's face is too cold," replied the young lady, turning away.

Aye, and her heart was cold toward the little stranger, of whom she had mentally said, "He is *not* my brother." For a moment the old wicked feelings came up and were strong, but gradually fell back to inactivity under a crowd of other things demanding attention. Happily, the mother had been too wise to witness that meeting, and happy was it for all that the baby's introduction took place when it did.

A tall boy approached with extended hand, around whom she flung her arms after an in-

stant's gaze into his face, fondly kissing his cheek against his will.

"Why, Mark, you have grown wonderfully! I shouldn't have known you anywhere else."

"It isn't likely you would in Albany. But I haven't grown more than an inch. Ann marked it for me on the kitchen door the day you went away, and just a few minutes ago I was measured again."

"Have you succeeded in reforming Ann?"

"I don't know what you call reforming, but she's a good girl anyhow."

"Ann, Ruth has come," said Mrs. Hawthorne, opening the door into the dining-room. "Won't you come and see her?"

"To be sure I will, bless her! Mighty han'some she's grown off there, and glad is Ann to say her back ag'in. Are ye well, miss?"

"Thank you, Ann, perfectly well," said Ruth, grasping the hard hand, "and glad to see you looking so well. You seem to have grown young. It must be you are growing handsome."

"Far from that it is, but indade I'm a happy woman, and a happy family we are. The mistress is a jewel. I never worked for a better mistress in all me life, and I'm not afraid to say

it, and as sure as me name is Ann Riley, I'll stay with her all the days of me life." Satisfied with her speech, the girl returned to her baking.

"No, No," shouted Lilian from the piazza, "Woodie's come. You come and see her."

"No, I sha'n't, either. Mabel Hope's come too, and I'm going to see her first. I like her best."

"I don't," and Lily came into the house quite disgusted.

Ruth went early to see Aunt Jenny, who had grown feeble and could no longer walk. The greeting was full of the old warmth, and the young lady thought she would like to be a child again, and ailing, just for the sake of lying on the lounge—whose feather cushion was made as high as ever—and being cared for.

"Ye've changed in your looks some since you went away, darling, and I hope it won't do you any harm to say ye've grown purtier, though I didn't use to think you could. I s'pose you're learnin' a sight too, mor'n a poor old woman like me has ever heard of, taking in great things, but have ye found room for the greatest of all idees? You know you used to be troubled with a great many questions, and Mabel told me—she couldn't help it, for I would know—that you'd been askin' the

great questions. It did my heart good to hear it. Have you got the answer? Tell me, Ruth, have you got *the answer?*?"

"Not yet, aunty, and don't talk about it now."

"But I want to, and you *must* bear with me, for this rheumatism is going to my heart some day to stop its beating. I don't know how soon, maybe before you go away, or before you get back from school ag'in. Maybe I sha'n't have another time, and it's a burden on me. I don't know what more can be done for you than has been, but by-me-by all doing will be stopped. That gentle 'Stranger' at the door'll stop knocking, and won't say any more in your hearing, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!' And, Ruth, as sure as you live there'll a time come when you will be weary and heavy laden with a load that no human being can take off, and you'll want a place to rest. With all your learning, when will you be wise?"

"Aunty, I'm doing the best I can, and it's too bad to talk to me so when I've just come home and want to be happy."

"Why, Ruth, I'm only trying to persuade you to be happy, and don't tell me you're doing the best you can when you're all the time saying,

‘Go thy way,’ to One you know you ought to let in.”

Ruth wept, but thought she had no time to attend to such matters then—they must be postponed a little longer; so drying her tears as soon as possible, she unfolded a package of small articles she had been making for Aunt Jenny’s comfort and the adornment of her room. The old lady was thankful and pleased, and her visitor dextrously prevented a renewal of the disagreeable subject.

Ruth tasted fully the sweetness of home-freedom. It was refreshing to sit at the home-table, so neatly spread and filled with delicious food, so different from the fare at school. The rooms, too, seemed fresh and clean, and she could not but accord to the graceful woman presiding there, whom she still refused to address as mother, excellent taste and skill in all that pertains to the arrangements of a home. Even Rose, it seemed, could find no fault with them.

The bad March weather obliging her to spend most of her time in-doors, she saw little of Mabel, and less of Frank, who had ceased to visit at the parsonage with his usual freedom, and who, she feared, was offended. In spite of the indifference of the daughter to the little stranger who had

come to make Mrs. Hawthorne's heart glad, and bind her still closer to the family by making her indeed a mother, never had the two enjoyed each other's society so well, and the latter looked forward to the time when all prejudice would wear away, and perfect unity be established at home.


The visit of Mr. Allaire was a great surprise to Ruth, and a still greater pleasure. If she had needed anything to aid in drowning the memory of aunty's disagreeable words, nothing could have been more effectual. But her father was troubled. He had waited in vain for some word which would give him permission to utter that of which his heart was so full, and feared that a new and powerful influence was springing up to stand between Ruth and her Maker. That she greatly admired Mr. Allaire was evident, and Mr. Hawthorne had not hesitated to question him as to where he stood in relation to God. The young man had replied with apparent frankness that he had not yet attended to the great interests of religion, and listened attentively while his Christian friend warned him of the dangers of delay and talked of the better part, the winning of the fadeless crown. Thanking him with tears, the listener promised to think of what he had

said; yet, when Mr. Hawthorne reflected upon the indirectness and careful wording of the young man's replies, he could discover little ground for hope.



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BEYOND.

CHOOL-DAYS came again quite soon enough for all parties, but while Ruth met them eagerly, Mabel left home with reluctance, glad to know that the opening term was to be the last. Unaware that she was not quite well, she found it difficult to be as energetic as she thought it her duty to be, and sighed to feel her ambition flag. As the weeks went by her weariness increased. It was difficult to study; the necessary journeys up and down the long flights of stairs were performed with languid steps, which, chiding herself, she would sometimes quicken for a moment, and then fall back into the same weary pace. The walks with the school soon becoming too laborious, Frank took her out every day in a carriage.

Then it became known that Mabel was ill,

and her fellow-students began to see how much they loved her. Not one but was anxious to do something for dear Miss Hope; they flocked round her with kindnesses, did all her errands and loaded her with little gifts. So constant was Mary Winchester in her attendance that Ruth was half vexed, complaining that no opportunity was left her of showing good will.

At length Mabel was forced to yield to Frank's entreaties and the physician's advice, and be taken home. She would be back in a week or two, she said, or, if not so soon, would keep up with her class and return to receive her diploma. Ruth believed her; but when she was gone, the room seemed so lonely and desolate that she entreated that Rose might share it with her until Mabel's return, which request was granted, greatly to the satisfaction of Miss Allaire. Frank, who accompanied Mabel home, called upon Ruth immediately after his return to let her know of his sister's welfare and then ceased to call.

But Ruth saw Mr. Allaire occasionally now, and the friendship between herself and Rose ripened fast. Since Mr. Allaire's visit at Hopeton she had been untroubled by thoughts of higher duties until Rose came to room with her. She

was so accustomed to Mabel's silent kneeling that it had ceased to touch her, but when Rose also knelt with prayer-book in hand, and seemed to be so long and intently absorbed in her devotions, she was startled, and asked herself if her voice were the only one not heard in heaven, if she were indeed the impious, ungrateful being Aunt Jenny seemed to make her. Again she formed the resolution to look into this matter anew, to look over her philosophy, which so poorly stood the test of years, and compare it more thoroughly with the religion of her father—that is, when the term should end, for now her powers were taxed to their utmost with her studies.

So busy was she that Rose, who was only an indifferent student, complained that she had scarcely more of her society than when they occupied separate rooms.

"But never mind," Ruth would say; "this is our last term, when we are working for honors."

"And when it is over, what?"

"You are going with me, Rosie, to stay a long time, when we shall visit to our hearts' content."

"And what then?"

"Your question startles me, for I often wonder what is before me. But you mean what I intend

to do, which I cannot tell. Stay at home, probably, and make myself useful ; perhaps teach, perhaps do what I have no idea of now."

"Yes, I think you will, since nothing ever comes as we plan it."

"Nothing, Rose?"

"Nothing to me, and I wonder what the future will be. I have had such a pleasant little life, and it has seemed as though I could see to the end of my school-days, but never any farther. I dread to have them over, and have nothing to look forward to, though I don't like school much. Does it ever happen that one lives very long who has no trouble?"

"It may be," said Ruth, gravely. "We cannot choose our lives, even after we arrive at the age of discretion. Something beyond us seems to control all things."

"Let us not talk about such things. You don't think, do you, that my life will all be as bright as it has been? I know you don't, so you need not answer. But if I ever want a friend, will you come to me?"

"If it be in my power."

"And if you are in trouble of any kind will you let me know?"

Ruth pondered the words.

"Of *any* kind?"

"Yes."

"That would be promising too much. I might be ashamed to call you."

"Oh no, that couldn't be. And I wouldn't be ashamed of you, even if you were of yourself. Promise, Ruth."

"I do."

The end of the term came, and Mabel had not returned to school. Ruth was entirely successful in all she had proposed, winning praise where she most desired it. At the closing *soirée* she was more than ever courted and admired, and received from Hubert Allaire more marked attention than he had previously shown her. Mr. and Mrs. Allaire were present, in many ways assuring her of their esteem.

But Rose could not be spared immediately. After a few weeks at the seaside with her parents and brother she should make the promised visit.

Again was Ruth tempted to murmur because she had not been born to such advantages.



CHAPTER XXIV.

DIVERGING PATHS.

ON the eve of her first departure for school, Mabel had received a call from Noel, who had done his utmost to straighten out his curls, and whose brown face had put on an amusingly dolorous expression. It was his opinion, stated in plain terms, that she had no business to go away; and further, his opinion that since she was going it was her duty to show her friendship for himself by writing to him. That was one way to do him good, the boy being fully sensible that his improvement was an object of charitable endeavor with nearly all his adult acquaintances. Somebody was always teaching him.

So Mabel had now and then written him pleasant little letters wherein the didactic was carefully shunned, receiving in return blotted sheets of pa-

per, scrawled over in characters hard to decipher. Well as she knew the difficulties under which the little fellow labored, she had no adequate idea of what each one of those unsightly epistles had cost him.

When Mabel came home ill, Noel was terribly frightened, and shedding honest tears, asked her if she was going to die as Lizzie did. Her assurance that she had no fears of that, but expected to be better in a few days, apparently cheered him, but no day passed in which he did not come to know if she was getting well; when, if he had chanced to hear any word of doubt respecting her recovery, he was ready to repeat it to her in its worst form and demand an explanation. Perhaps Mabel's spirits were sometimes depressed by his words, but being too confident of her health to be alarmed, she generally smiled them away from her thoughts as some of Noel's vagaries. By and by, as she grew no worse apparently, and her illness ceased to be talked of, he began to think her well again, and to urge her to resume her class in the Sabbath-school.

"I tell you what it is, Mabel Hope," he said, one day, for reverence and politeness were not enumerated among his virtues, "if you don't take

that class again I sha'n't stay there, and it'll all run down. You don't want it to run down, do you? And you ought to let me come here and study every day so you can help me."

"You may come and study a while here," she replied after a moment's thought, "but I cannot promise to help you. You don't need much help."

"No, not much, but then those sums puzzle, I tell *you*! You don't suppose I could do them alone, do you?"

"To be sure you could if you would go to work in the right way. What if your father should call for help in computing interest, or be unable to calculate the cost of articles he wished to buy?"

"Humph! he wouldn't have to do that; but then he's a man."

"Which you are going to be, and unless you begin to rely upon yourself now, you will not be able to do so then."

So Noel brought his books and sat with Mabel while he studied, and bearing with him patiently, and avoiding all apparent instruction, she managed to lead him, by slow degrees it is true, into improved methods of thinking and doing, until he looked upon her as his one friend.

But Mark and Noel were getting on after the old fashion. Mark could not like Noel, but felt that he ought to do something for his benefit, and went at times directly about it with such a show of effort that the other plainly saw it, and refused to be reformed. Then, discouraged, the work was abandoned as hopeless, and its object disregarded.

The church and parsonage had both been repaired, and, in part, refurnished. Mrs. Hawthorne's taste and skill had done much toward beautifying the grounds about her home, and the smile of the skies seemed everywhere to be answered by a smile on the face of the earth. Mabel, who was better, came early to see Ruth, and the two spent many of the long summer days together. But Mabel was not strong, Frank absented himself, there were no rambles now, and the pleasures in which the three shared were few, so that it was no repetition of former summers. Nothing in the change was sad to Ruth but her friend's illness; a sweet dream, held constantly yet tremblingly within her heart, sweetened all else in her life.

By and bye Rose came accompanied by her brother, who early sought an interview with Mr.

Hawthorne, asking permission to seek Ruth's hand in marriage.

"I shall give my daughter her choice in that matter," was the reply, "but I shall be very sorry if she marries a man whose principles have not for their foundation the rock Christ Jesus, or to see her the mistress of a home unsanctified by prayer."

A few days previous to this Mr. Hawthorne had interrogated his daughter. What did she know of Mr. Allaire? What in the family pleased her so much? Was it an influence which awakened her better feelings, made her less selfish and more in earnest to make her life a blessing to others? Did it lead her to think more highly of the Bible and of God, and to mourn at the thought of her own shortcomings?

These questions had been asked less for the sake of gaining replies than reminding her of the principles which ought to govern us all in the choice of friends. But when the young man had spoken, the father knew what the result would be.

Ruth thought herself happy above all happy ones. God was good after all, and she could love him now, not in Aunt Jenny's rude way,

not as her father worshipped, but in her own way since the desire of her heart was granted her.

The next day Hubert said to her, "I have to reveal to you a fact which, owing to the present state of public opinion, I conceal from those I care most to please, and from all save a few sympathizing associates. The revelation has never been made to my parents and sister, but from you, with whom I hope to share all my future, nothing should be concealed. I make the confession now only from a high sense of honor, and with the fear that it will rob me of you whom I love better than life.

"My religious opinions are not drawn from the Bible. If I could make my faith what I would like to have it, you would see me going with the mass of respectable people, a devout church-member; but belief is not dependent upon the will. I could not change even to save you to myself. I believe that there is no such God as Christians worship, and that death is sleep for ever. The Bible is a book venerable on account of its age and its excellent system of morals, but it is no revelation."

Then, with ardent assertions of love, he asked

Ruth if she could become the wife of such a heretic. She did not reply at first.

No God! Then Hubert could have no sympathy with that delicious feeling of thankfulness she experienced. No hereafter! No heaven where friends should meet and dwell for ever, pursuing the most congenial employments and possessing all the delights which earth denied!

In marrying him she would place herself under influences directly contrary to those in the midst of which she had been reared, break her father's heart if he knew all, and turn her back upon the prayers and teachings of her angel mother. She knew how much better is a Christian than a godless home.

But could she, whose life had been a continual strife against these influences, now sacrifice her dearest hope in their favor? What her loved one believed would make no difference in the great facts. He was an honorable man, as he had just now shown, who would never deceive her. She looked up to see his eyes filled with tears, his frame quivering with emotion.

"Be merciful, Ruth," he said; "you have hopes for the hereafter, but remember that out of this world I have nothing. Life is short; do not dash

its one sweetness away from me. My friends are my gods, and you supreme, whom I love with all the heart, owning no higher, wanting none."

"You are a sad heretic. I must cure you."

"Do if you can. But in this particular, and only this, I doubt your power."

"Does my father know what you have told me?"

"No, darling, I could not tell him, nor did I think it necessary. It is a matter for you alone to decide, as he wisely said. Remember that I offer you more than any Christian man can do, the homage of an undivided heart, the first and highest place, while he could honestly give you only a second."

This conversation took place in the morning, and the young woman's face was sad when she sought her own room and gave herself to the task of persuading duty to walk with passion. She was not blind to the sophistry of Hubert's words, and knew that love founded in selfishness is unworthy of the name, but she could not see that only when we love God can we love our friends aright. Should an idea sever two souls thus firmly knit together, she asked, and make life a desolation to both?

That evening there was a pleasant gathering of the family and their visitors in the parlor, when Rose, Mark and the younger ones clustered round Mr. Hawthorne with the old demand for a story, and he gave them one founded on these lines of George Herbert:

"My God, I heard this day
That none doth build a stately habitation,
But that he means to dwell therein."

It was the story of the Beautiful House which a king had built and given to his son, with the single stipulation that it should be kept in order and open to him whenever he should choose to come. But the house being allowed to run to waste, the king was an unwelcome guest and admittance refused him. He was grieved, and went again and again only to be excluded.

"I hope he'll det in," said Channing, when his father paused, leaving his story unfinished.

"Did he, papa?" said Lily.

"That has not yet come to pass, my dear."

Ruth and Mr. Allaire were amusing themselves in another part of the room, but heard it nearly all, and the former knew it was meant for her.

It was time for the children to go to bed, so

the Bible was brought and the father read the chapter beginning, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

After the prayer, Mark took Rose to the library to see his new butterfly, where, after a little, his parents joined them. When the time for good-nights had come, Rose took the minister's hand, and said in a low voice :

"I thank you, dear Mr. Hawthorne, for your story, and will try to open my heart to my Father, the King."





CHAPTER XXV.

ANTICIPATION.

HUBERT ALLAIRE was gone, but would return to accompany his sister home when her visit should be ended. And after a year, during which time he would visit them often, he was coming to claim Ruth as his bride. She was keeping doubt and fear under her feet, and so full of hope was her heart, so glad with summer and love, that the departure of her lover gave only a temporary shadow, and plans sprang up whose execution was a joy. Mabel did not receive the news of Ruth's engagement with the pleasure she had expected, and Aunt Jenny had asked, "Is your man a Christian?" But these things could not suffice to give her permanent annoyance.

Mabel was worse again, able to do very little for her own diversion, and physicians shook their

heads, giving her friends to understand that not immediate death, but a life of weakness, was before her. Poor Mabel! whose natural gifts had been improved by the highest culture within her reach, who had money, influence and a loving heart, all of which she had hoped to give for those who sit in darkness! If this were not possible, she would desire to be an active Christian at home, but to be laid aside to do nothing seemed more than she could bear. She had been told that trials and disappointments must come, and expected them in a general way, but was wholly unprepared for this. While trying to say, "Thy will be done," it did not seem possible that it should be the will of God that she should fail thus. Had not others in poor health roused themselves to duty and done much in the midst of pain and suffering? So she tried, but without visible success, and the failure stung her day by day worse than disease.

Sometimes we want to be Martha when we should be Mary, or Mary when we should be Martha; but He in whose service our part has been performed will welcome with "Well done" both those who have sat at his feet and those who have served.

Ruth and Rose were approaching Mr. Hope's residence when the latter pointed to a lady at one of the windows.

"Oh, who is that?"

"Miss Littlefield! Miss Littlefield!" said the other, enthusiastically, while both hastened forward.

They were right, and on entering found Miss Winchester also, whom their teacher had brought to be a companion for Mabel, if she would accept her.

"I am going to-morrow," she said, while accompanying the girls a part of their way home, "and shall leave Mary for a visit at least. Something must be done for her. She cannot stay at her guardian's, and she needs a home among gentle people; and no one else can help her forget herself and her awkwardness or win her to love and trust like dear Miss Hope. Your mother, too, Miss Ruth, will be her friend."

Mrs. Hawthorne, who was greatly interested in the fact of Mary's arrival, knowing better than her other friends what the poor girl had suffered, made haste to see her before Miss Littlefield's departure. Mabel was anxious to have her remain; her mother hesitated, but their pastor's wife

suggested that they could at least try her, and Mary Winchester became a permanent member of their little circle. At first she was shy and awkward, but the genial atmosphere of a Christian home, such as she had never before known, softened her nature, and she grew to fear others less and confide in herself more, while her affection for Mabel knew no bounds.

Mark was thinking less of his Christian experiences now than formerly, and sometimes feared that they were ceasing to be. He was becoming a scholar, and every part of God's creation seemed to have a mystery to reveal to him, which he was in haste to hear. When so much was to be learned there was not a minute to be lost, and "One thing at a time" he found the hardest of all maxims to obey. Traps for minks, down by the river, were still occasionally set, but oftener snares for birds in whose study he was becoming interested. Butterflies were chased for another purpose now than formerly; he began to observe the commonest stones, and gave Ann and his mother much trouble by converting kitchen utensils into chemical and philosophical apparatus, and failing, when his purpose was served, to restore them to their original condition. In the

sky he saw bright worlds, of whose magnitude he could form only a faint conception, grandly revolving alone, and yet dependent upon each other, and caught there an idea of his own littleness and God's infinity. But to sit still and wonder and adore was doing too little; he was in haste to be able to calculate their revolutions and distances, and tell from his own computations the precise moment when the moon would wheel her little black disk into the face of the sun and shut out its light, or when she would voluntarily travel into the shadow of the great earth and be herself benighted. So many things came crowding upon his attention that when he knelt to ask for help of God, his thoughts were often so busy as to crowd out the sense of his need and the presence of the One addressed. He went through the form of prayer without the heart; and rising from his knees, frightened at his impiety, exclaimed, "Lord God, forgive my prayer!" Yet he would not intentionally dishonor that God for any price the world could pay him.

Mark had a great liking for Frank Hope, and sought his society whenever an opportunity presented, as he was sure to gain from him a patient explanation of his difficulties and sympathy in

all his plans. And Frank loved the boy, it seemed to him, more and more, as the distance between himself and Ruth increased.

To Mark, Hubert Allaire was a gentleman quite above ordinary men, the hem of whose garment he scarcely dared to touch, and of whom it was a wonder that Ruth was not afraid. He listened to his elegant conversation with fixed attention, and believed him the most learned person he had ever seen. His judgment approved of his sister's choice. He was proud of it, but after all wished she was going to marry some one not so far above the rest of them, to whom he could talk familiarly.

Rose Allaire delighted him. Her artlessness was charming, and the interest she took in all he said and learned, her oft-repeated expressions of surprise at the amount he knew, were flattering, and he wished she would stay with them always. The time of her sojourn in Hopeton, and of Frank's also, was the sunniest part of the summer. It was strange how soon autumn came when they had gone.

The year rolled away, but circumstances made it seem best to all parties to postpone the wedding two or three months longer. The proposition

had been made by Mr. Hawthorne, and Mr. Al-laïre reluctantly consented. Frank returned from college full of honors, and, after a short stay at home, sailed for Europe.

One fine evening in the early part of September Hannah Jennison came to the dining-room door of the parsonage saying that her mother wished to see Ruth immediately.

"And, Mrs. Hawthorne," she added, "it would be a comfort to me if you would go too. Mother seems worse to-night, and I don't know what to think of her."

Ruth had hurried away, and was the first to reach the invalid's room. Kneeling at the bedside, she clasped one of the distorted hands, which were fast growing cold.

"I am here, aunty."

"You, Ruth? Thank God! I'm going now to my Father's house! I a'n't afraid, for I am sure of a welcome there. But, darling, when I see your mother what shall I say? Shall I say Ruth is coming here, or that she is going the other way?"

The young woman's heart beat violently, but she made no reply.

"And when I see Jesus, who loves you better

than your mother, shall I say, 'Ruth has taken up her cross and is following you, blessed Lord'? Answer me before I die."

Ruth had the feeling that her destiny hung upon the decision of that moment. But to follow Christ then would be to renounce all her hopes for this world. At no other time in her life had the cross been so heavy to lift. Her strength was not equal to the task, and she sought no other, but groaned despairingly.

Here the others entered, and the dying woman's power to speak failed her, and she seemed half unconscious.

"She is almost home," said Mr. Hawthorne.

Hannah knelt on the opposite side of the bed and took the other hand.

"Speak to me, mother."

"God—bless—my child!"

Mr. Hawthorne took the hand which Ruth was holding.

"Do you know me, aunty?"

The feeble pressure of her fingers answered

"Yes," while her lips said faintly, "Pray."

They knelt, and the face of the dying grew serene under the sound of prayer.

When the petition was ended, the hand which

Mr. Hawthorne had relinquished seemed to be seeking something, and Ruth took it. Summoning all her ebbing strength, Mrs. Jennison said clearly:

"What shall I say?"

"What does she mean?" inquired Hannah.

She who knew did not answer.

"Ruth!"

"Tell them I hope to come," was the reply, which the speaker felt to be half false.

"Is that all?" said the dying woman, speaking with great difficulty and freeing her hand.

Ruth, who felt the words to be almost her sentence of doom, turned away faint, and would have fallen had not her father, beginning to comprehend something of the scene, supported her.

"My poor child!" he said.

Slowly life ebbed away, and when morning sunbeams stole into the chamber they gilded a face of marble. But the cold form had no need of them. The soul had gone to the Lord, her everlasting light, and the days of her mourning were ended.

Bury the body, for it will not feel the darkness of the grave. Its cold will not chill it, its air will not stifle. Even that shall have no more pain.



CHAPTER XXVI.

HOPES DASHED TO THE EARTH.

RUTH sat alone in her cozy room, but her face, reflected in the glass, looked not quite so happy as that of one so nearly a bride ought to be. She saw it and smiled faintly.

"I will throw off this feeling," she said aloud, laying aside her sewing, and opening the writing-desk upon the table. "I am foolish to worry, but—"

The sentence was not finished, and tears stole from her eyes as she proceeded to date a letter and write the name of the one dearest to her, when Mark, who had been for the mail, was heard coming up stairs, and she opened the door before he had time to knock.

"Will you give me a smile for this, Miss So-

ber-face?" he asked, holding up a letter with its superscription concealed.

"Yes, and a kiss too, you darling boy!" and before he could run away she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him heartily. Then closing the door and assuring herself that this was the looked-for letter, she slowly opened it in delicious expectation. But there was a strange coldness in the language, and she read on to find that her dream of joy was over. What she could not do for herself had been done for her by a higher Power. But life seemed emptied of all that was sweet, and its prolongation must be a torture. Only a moan escaped her lips. She looked around her with a bewildered feeling that something terrible had come, and shuddering at the loneliness of her room, thought it best not to stay there. Gliding into the parlor, where the family were gathered, she sat down and tried to be gay with Lily, laughing aloud with a hollow sound that startled all ears.

"Ruth looks and laughs like a ghost!" exclaimed Mark.

"What has happened?" inquired her mother, looking at her anxiously.

"I am desperately tired to-night. I'd better

go to bed, and in the morning I shall be—" but here her voice failed.

"Rested?" inquired Mrs. Hawthorne, apprehensively.

But there was no reply, and Ruth left the room abruptly. She opened the Bible. Could it give help? Its sentences were meaningless. Wearily she sought her couch, but not to sleep. The night was filled with low moans which no one was near enough to hear save He whose loving ear no moan escapes. In the morning Ruth dressed herself mechanically, and went mechanically about her duties.

So haggard was her appearance at breakfast, that her father was alarmed, and would have sent for a physician as soon as the morning devotions were over had not his wife restrained him.

"I do not think it is medicine she needs," she said, taking him aside.

"What is it then?" he asked.

"She has had a blow which she wishes to conceal, and has managed thus far to stand under, through force of will; but she cannot hold out much longer."

"What do you suspect?"

"Mark carried her a letter from Mr. Al-

laire last night. Something in that direction I fear."

"We must find out; the child is almost dying. Can you not gain her confidence?"

"You know she has never fully accepted me as her mother, but you are her father."

"Lacking in tact and ability to understand her. Poor child! from how much I might have saved her with more skill, God only knows. My hand is too clumsy to probe the wound, but I must try."

Mrs. Hawthorne went to the sitting-room to request Ruth to see her father in the study, but the daughter, feeling her strength fail, had returned to her own room and bed, where the mother found her.

"Your father wishes to see you, my dear; may he come up?"

"If he chooses."

But the good woman stayed a little to put the room in order, and then, going to the bed, bent over the sufferer with eyes full of tears, saying, only,

"My poor child!"

Ruth looked up: "Mother"—it was the first time she had ever addressed her thus—"mother,

it is all over. Take this letter to father," handing the crumpled thing she had all the time kept, "and then come back to me, please. I am not well this morning."

Mrs. Hawthorne did as requested, making haste to return. Her husband was filled with anger at the wrong done to his daughter, and yet glad that the tie binding her to the man he distrusted was severed. "He is a villain," he said, rapidly pacing the room, "and I ought to have known it."

Meanwhile his wife was sitting by the side of the afflicted girl with silent caresses and tears of sympathy, but torturing her by no word which could open the wound. For a long time they had not spoken.

"Mother, I have wronged you a great many times, but you treat me as though I were forgiven."

"And you are, dear, fully, fully."

"Thank you, mother. Mother," she repeated as though there were comfort in the word, and then fell to weeping, the first tears she had shed since the reception of that terrible letter. "I am silly to give up like this; I didn't think I should, but it shall not crush me."

"No, dear, not silly; you could not help it. It is necessary to bend before the storm, which at length will be overpast, and then you will be stronger for what you have borne."

"Stronger, mother! How can I live? I have nothing to live for!"

Another silence ensued, broken by the entrance of Mr. Hawthorne, who, with all the father aroused, exclaimed, "He is a villain, Ruth, and I am glad you are free from him."

"Oh, father, not that!"

"Yes, that. Your heavenly Father, more merciful than I, has interposed to save you. Seeing poison in the cup, he has dashed it away. Ruth, my child, he is better to us than friend or lover!"

"I hope I shall see it so by and by, but I can't now."

Ruth had loved with all her heart only to be scorned, and her strong staff, pride, being smitten, she had nothing left to lean on. That she, who had been so sure of her power and so sought after, should have given herself so wholly to another only to be cast off in this manner, to have it said that she had been "disappointed," was a terrible humiliation, which, added to her keener pain, utterly prostrated her. For a few

days she was too weak to rise from her bed, and it was no wonder that in helplessness and suffering, educated as she had been, her thoughts should go out often to the Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, who was despised and rejected of men.

But it was impossible for one with her strength of will to remain long in this state. Her pride rose again, and she began to recover. As soon as she was able to go about the house she locked away all her bridal attire and gave the key to her mother. Her father brought Mabel, who was still able to ride a little, to spend a day at the parsonage, but all other associates were avoided. She worked constantly, was gay, restless, irritable, and grew thin and pale. Of her mental experiences she said nothing. To divert her attention from herself, her father proposed that she should travel a little with him, and, in the execution of his plan, first left her at the house of a wealthy relative whose portion was in this world, who, when he gained anything, planted it firmly, as he thought, in the earth, where it should grow and bring forth fruit, not for the needy ones around him, but for himself. He had a home so beautiful that it would have hardly seemed out of

place in Eden. Success seemed to attend his every effort, and no visible shadow rested upon the household. Ruth had remained in the family but a short time, however, before discovering signs of discontent; a little longer, and there was revealed wretchedness.

Next, she visited an aunt, a widowed sister of her own mother, whose portion of this world's goods was very small, but held and used gratefully; who felt herself dependent for everything, even daily bread, upon her heavenly Father; who never lacked, and always managed to spare something for those more needy than herself; whose children were industrious, self-denying, affectionate and obedient. Ruth pitied their poverty, yet envied their happiness. From their home she wrote to her father:

"I write because I wish to unburden myself to some one, and to whom can I go with greater confidence? From infancy you have taught me those great truths so dear to you, hoping that I might love them, and thereby be saved. I wish I had, but my own thoughts and ways were dear, and incompatible with those you endeavored to form in me. The burden and yoke of Christ for me were too heavy and hard to bear, and I re-

jected all. You never knew how little belief I had or tried to have in what you were teaching. As I grew older my skepticism by degrees wore away, and, seeing that few of those whom I wished to call friends were irreligious, I resolved to turn my attention in that direction. But there was never any time, and at length it became an impossibility.

"You know how all at once everything I cherished, every hope, was stripped from me. Now I am not penitent for my past life, however much I may wish it had been otherwise, but look upon it, like all things else, with indifference. I feel benumbed, incapable of movement in any direction. I hear a voice from the Man of sorrows, saying, 'Come unto me,' and know that somewhere there is rest, and yet I do not go: What have I to offer if I do? Only these dregs, after the wine of the cup has been spilled, and to do that seems base. Still, I must find a support somewhere, and lean either upon the vague, mysterious God, or the tangible world. I do not know which it will be.

"Though stripped of all that I possess, I have not ceased to be proud. Your religion seems to be the religion of sorrow, a cave Adullam, where

resort all who are in distress, and in debt, and discontented. Aunt Agnes is there because she is poor, Cousin James stays away because he is rich. For me to join that company is to make a confession to the world which I do not wish to make. I know that it is claimed that religion is joy, but facts do not seem to prove it. Pleasure-seekers shun it. Its Author was despised and rejected of men, and his followers were the poor and suffering, whose griefs, we have reason to believe, were not all healed by the immediate presence of Immanuel."

Mr. Hawthorne replied :

"You cannot know how sweet to me is the confidence of my child after it has been so long withheld. But were you in all respects sincere in writing what you did? I cannot think so poorly of your judgment as to believe it.

"You claim that the kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of sorrow, whose royal palace is a cave whither only the unhappy repair. But not all the unhappy, since your cousin James stays away as well as many others like him. One would think, from the examples you cite, true enjoyment to be the result of the supply of physical wants, and man's life to consist in the abundance of the

things he possesseth. Surely you are not so gross as to believe this, and I have no need to disprove it.

"I admit that God has chosen the poor and suffering of this world to be rich in faith, thereby giving them the greater inheritance, but not those alone. Need I point you to some of your most intimate friends whose lives, before accepting him as their portion, seemed to be all sunshine, and who have been serener and brighter ever since? Pleasure-seekers—I suppose you mean happiness-seekers—shun this cave. Yes, the unwise, who never find the object of their search elsewhere. Still, it is true that it is pre-eminently the refuge of the sorrowful.

"I have seen you pick the buds from your young plants lest too early flowering should injure their growth, and mercilessly sever some of their finest shoots that they might be symmetrical in growth. The slips you are rooting you keep in the dark. What is sorrow but the picking of the buds—the pruning, the darkness? We have all felt it, not you alone, and doubtless we shall need more of it. As to 'the cave Adullam,' instead of despising it and being ashamed to enter it, let us thank God for a refuge in the cleft rock, a

hiding-place. What if to resort thither be to confess that the world is unsatisfactory, or has given us a hurt. It is the highest declaration we can make, since it was not meant to satisfy, but to help us on to a permanent country. Stoop down, my child, and enter the cave; you have the the promise of One greater than I that you shall not find it dark.

"But your letter ignores the Hereafter, whose steady and sure approach we so constantly forget, and the hour whose terrors can be mitigated only by the presence of Him who is the resurrection and the life, in whom believing, though dead, yet shall we live. It is his voice, Ruth, you hear saying, 'Come to me.' Oh, if you would obey!

"There are two worlds beyond this, one of happiness, the other of woe. In which does He reign whose business here was to alleviate suffering?

"Is Christ's religion, then, one of sorrow or of joy?"

Ruth's deportment after her return home was fitful in the extreme, ranging through all degrees from mirthfulness to despondency. No longer making her father or any one her confidant, she

showed her old unwillingness to be spoken to on the subject of religion ; but when it was a topic of conversation between others, and to her father's sermons, she listened with intense interest.

Very soon after that cruel letter from Hubert, she had received one from Rose, written with her usual artlessness, and evincing no knowledge of the rupture between her brother and Ruth, but making no reference to their marriage. Ruth had replied, with some asperity, Rose must not write to her any more, as she wished to bury all remembrance of those who were once to her pleasant friends. But Rose did write again.

"I knew nothing of it, dear Ruth, nor do I now know what it means. I am afraid Hubert has done wrong. I don't know; he is my brother and I love him. I am so sorry—sorrier than I ever was before in my life, God has given me such a happy life. You may not love me now, but I shall love you always; to my heart you shall always be a sister."

Other letters followed this, but Ruth did not deign a reply.

Not a year had elapsed when she read the announcement of Mr. Allaire's marriage. The next day and for several days she was ill.



CHAPTER XXVII.

LED TO THE ROCK.

AGAIN Mark Hawthorne, now a tall young man, rapped at his sister's door with letters one evening toward the last of March. There was no eagerness in their reception, and had been none since that fatal night, more than a year and a half ago. Glancing at their superscriptions, she laid aside one with a quick, impatient gesture, and proceeded to read the others, which, being finished, were deliberately refolded, re-enveloped, endorsed with the time of reception and laid carefully aside with the unanswered.

Should she open the remaining one? Why, after so long a silence, should Rose write, for this was surely in her hand, though not so well written as usual. Mechanically the envelope was cut and she read,

“Come to me, Woodie, for I am going away

never to come back, and must see you again before I die. I am very sick, and cannot get well. I did not think when you and I were so much together, that we should ever be so far apart, for now you seem a great way off. I wanted you for my sister. But something happened—they would never tell me what—and you would not love me any more. But you will love me now? you will not refuse to come? There is no Hubert here for you to meet; he is far away across the ocean. Papa and mamma want you to come. You surely will not deny your poor little Rose this last request? Come to me then, dear Woodie, without delay."

Ruth hesitated, but her father said "Go," and she obeyed.

Arriving late in the evening, it was thought best that Ruth should not see Rose until morning, the latter having been unusually restless during the day. She was shown to her room, the same she and Rose had occupied during her visit there when they were schoolmates. Being left alone, she sat with folded hands, occupied with bitter thoughts, when voices were heard in an adjoining room, one of which seemed to be that of the maid who had just left her, and to whose conver-

sation she was attracted by the mention of her name.

"She's the one that Mr. Hubert was going to marry."

"*She* is? Well, why didn't he?"

"She wasn't rich enough. I heard his mother say that. You see he *will have* everything very grand about him, and it will take more money than he'd ever get to support him. So you see it was very convenient for him to marry a rich wife."

Ruth did not need to hear this to make her wretched. She believed it, and thought bitterly of his professions, and of the love he boasted of as being so much superior to that a Christian could give. How foolish to come where all the pain, whose edge had been blunted a little, must be sharpened anew! But how could it be helped? And what good could her coming do Rose, who under these circumstances should not have called her? Then, ashamed of this selfishness and this continual brooding over a wrong she ought long ago to have lived down, she strove to put away all these unpleasant thoughts, but without success. Where was her old strength—the force of former days?

"Come to me" sounded a voice through the darkness and above the noise of the storm without—a voice she had heard so many times before—from One ready to bear her burden. It seemed that to Him who knew her so fully she need not be ashamed to tell her trouble, but there was more than that involved in seeking him; and how could she go? Where find the invisible One?

With these and a thousand other reflections was the long night filled, and it was nearly morning when they were forgotten in sleep. She awoke late to find the sun shining clear and warm and the business of the day begun, for men were hurrying along the streets, and coming up to the door were two little children with flowers for Rose.

The breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Allaire was formal enough. They seemed to be embarrassed in her presence, and yet glad she had come. It being finished, the lady asked if she would see Rose then, at the same time leading the way up stairs.

"She knew you had come last night, but cheerfully acquiesced in my decision that she must not see you until morning. Now she is impatient."

"Shall I find her very low?"

"Much changed. Our winters are hard, but spring has come, and we feel sure she will rally. As soon as she is strong enough we shall take her to a better climate."

Ruth thought she had little need to restrain her feelings in meeting Rose, whom she found sitting in an easy-chair, watching for her appearance, and whose eyes met hers the moment the door was opened. She advanced a step or two, and then paused to assure herself. Could this be Rose, this girl with hollow cheeks, sunken yet large, bright, wistful eyes, and thin, wasted hands, white as the pillow against which she leaned?

"Rose!"

"Ruth!"

In a moment they were clasped in each other's arms. All hardness was melted and one was in tears, but Rose did not weep.

"Dear heart," she said, "you are changed too. Are you sick?"

"Oh no, very well."

"But your ghastly face almost frightened me. Meeting it in the street I should not have dreamed of its being Woodie's. Am I changed much, dear?"

Ruth did not reply, but her tears fell fast.

"I knew you would come. I could not go till you did. Do you love me, Ruth?"

"Yes, darling;" and she spoke truly.

She rose and tried to wipe away the tears in order to meet the dear eyes seeking hers, but not being able, went abruptly to the window to regain her self-possession, where she remained so long that the invalid grew tired of waiting and called her.

"Ruth!"

"Yes, dear," returning with a clear face, when they sat together for some minutes without speaking.

Then came on a fit of coughing so severe as to seem more than the slight frame could endure. Her mother and the nurse came in, but Ruth did all that could be done.

"I see you know how to care for one who suffers thus, Miss Hawthorne," said Mrs. Allaire. She used to say Ruth.

"You may safely leave me with her, mamma, and the air is so fine to-day you ought to go out. Nurse will be here, you know."

Her mother shook her head.

"Go, to please me. You need all the strength

you can get when I worry you so. Promise me you will, please. We will not talk much."

Mrs. Allaire yielded, and they were left alone, when Rose fell back among her pillows, and, remaining silent, caressed Ruth's hand, while the latter talked a little of Mabel and Mary.

"Poor Mabel!" said Rose. "How long she suffers! I am more highly favored. Do you believe, Ruth, that I am going to die soon?"

"Your letter told me so, but—"

"Do not be afraid to say it. Did you think, when you stopped to look at me, that I would live long?"

"You startled me, Rose."

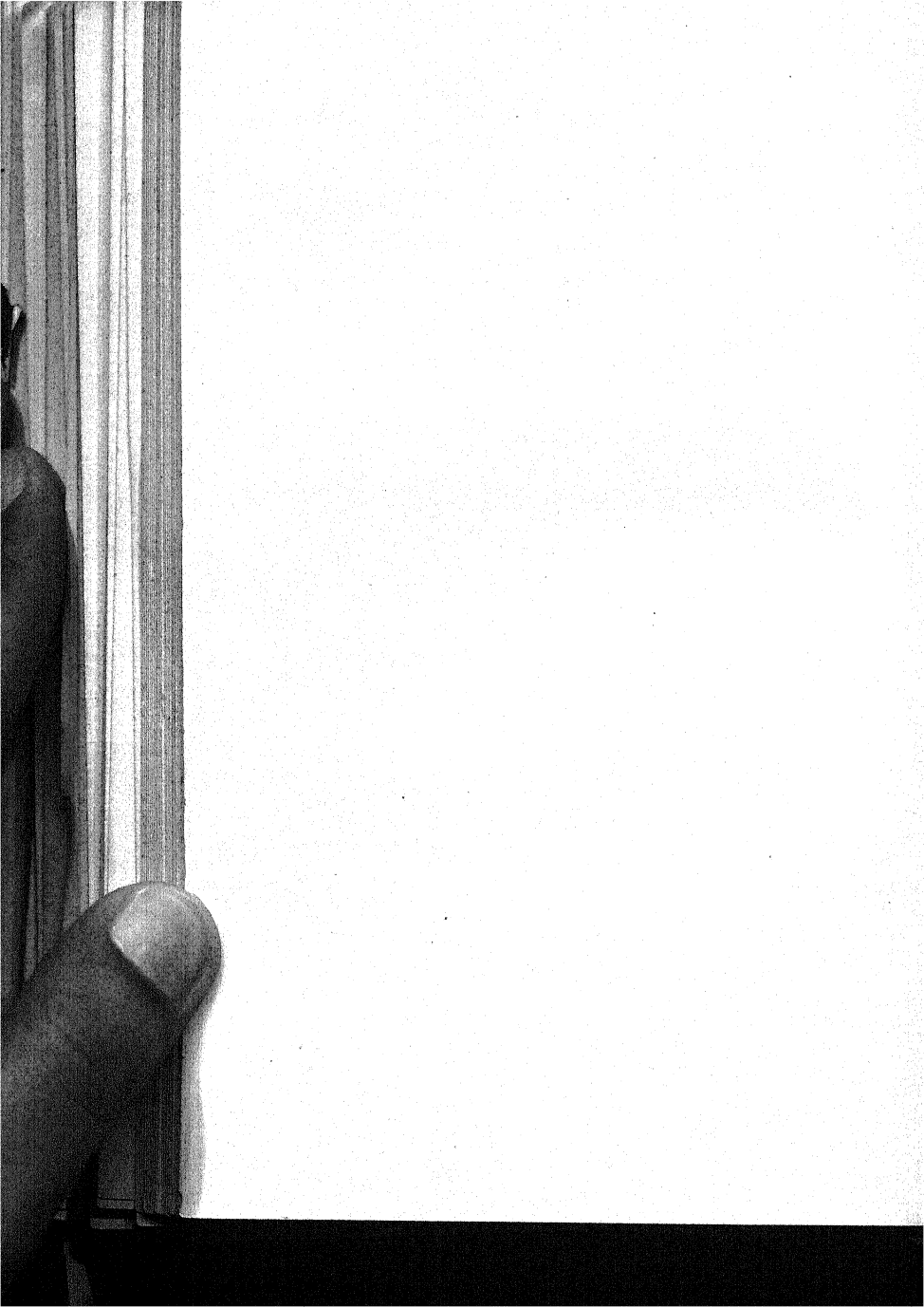
"And you thought I could not get well. I am sure I cannot. Poor papa and mamma will be very lonely without me. If it were not for them, I should not care. I am so sorry for them. They think they shall keep me always, that being poorly I am low-spirited, and they don't want me to read the Bible lest it should make me more so. Reading is tiresome, but if some one would read to me now and then—I said to myself if Ruth were only here she would do it—and sing me some of those old hymns, so often sung in your prayer-meetings. Was I selfish?"



Ruth Hawthorne.

The Ill Friend.

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"Oh how I enjoyed my visit at your house!—better than anything else I can remember. Everything was so fresh and simple and good, yet you all the time thought you were not elegant enough for me. I had been trying to love Jesus, and think I did, but that visit helped me a great deal. I heard so much about him there and saw so much of him that it was delightful to stay. I think it will be so in heaven, only I shall not hear of him, but *see him*, and be able to talk with him face to face.

"Mamma wonders when I talk so, and doesn't like to hear anything to remind her of what is coming. She can't think how worthless everything she prizes seems to me, who am just about to leave it all and go where everything is more beautiful and more enduring. But the beauty matters little—not that I am tired of it—I want something better. Even love there is of a better kind than ours that we feel before we know Jesus. Once I should have been angry when you would not write to me, but now I was only sorry. I pitied you, Woodie.

"Nobody is selfish in heaven. Jesus is there, and I shall know better how he loves me—I mean feel it more, never forget it—and love him with

all my heart. He is very kind to take me up to himself so early.

"Sometimes it seems as though my life had amounted to nothing, and I'm ashamed to have done so little. But then I think of other roses, tiny, frail things, which have only a little beauty and fragrance to pray for living. I hope I have had some and I have tried to give all. I have given my love to God, and he will accept it and me, I know. All the world is better for roses, so maybe I have done some good."

Rose spoke with difficulty.

"You are talking too long," said Ruth. "You must rest a little."

"But you will not go away?"

"No, dear, but get my work and sit here close beside you."

"Then I can look at you, which will be almost as good as talking. By and by you shall sing to me. But I am selfish, Ruth. Would you not like to go out with mamma? She has not gone yet, I think."

"Oh no, no! I came to stay with you, and should not enjoy going."

So Ruth brought some quiet work, and they sat close to each other with only an occasional

word. Rose had been looking steadily at her friend.

"I am afraid Hubert has done wrong. Will you forgive him, Ruth?"

No answer came.

"For my sake, dear, and because we all need forgiveness."

Again no answer.

After a little the nurse came in, and Rose was placed upon the bed, and by and by her mother returned and talked of what she had seen while out, the people, the rich goods in the stores, and the spring styles, in all of which her daughter appeared to try to be interested for a time, and then turned wearily away.

Dinner came, after which Mr. Allaire went up to see his pet, diverting her with pleasant plans for the summer, of whose approach the day was so strong a reminder. She made no objection, but received all sweetly, without her old enthusiasm. She proposed to be carried down stairs, where Ruth would play and sing for them, and the proposition met with favor, the father regarding it as an indication that his darling was coming back to her interest in life. So wrapping her carefully in shawls, he carried her down to the

parlor, where they had more merriment than all the long days of drooping had afforded. Ruth at the piano was ready to obey any call, and Mr. Allaire asked for witty song after witty song, all the time watching the faded little Rose that leaned upon him to see if she enjoyed them, knowing which, she pitied her father, vastly more in need of sympathy than herself, and enjoyed them for his sake. Mrs. Allaire wanted popular instrumental pieces, which Ruth was so happy as to execute greatly to the satisfaction of her hearers.

"Well, pet, what do you want?" said Mr. Allaire, at length, after they had listened for some time. "You must take your share before long, or we shall tire Miss Hawthorne out. We are taxing her heavily."

"She does not often tire of playing. She can do it too well."

But Ruth was tired. All that day she had been moaning within herself, almost ready to listen to that call made so long ago to the weary and heavy laden. But the sweet Rose was a rebuke to her selfishness, and turning to her with a sad smile, she said:

"What shall I sing for you?"

“‘Rock of ages, cleft for me.’”

How that simple line, those old yet unworn words, touched the singer! To *hide herself* was just what she wanted. After an improvised prelude, whose sweetness did much toward charming its author into trust, she sang, making the hymn her own prayer, and in that moment did hide in the Rock, and praying on, the words were at once a revelation, a confession and a song of triumph, moving the listeners, some of them, to tears.

“CHRIST THE ROCK OF AGES.

“Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood
From thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save from wrath, and make me pure.

“Should my tears for ever flow,
Should my zeal no languor know,
This for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and thou alone;
In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling.

“While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyelids close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold thee on thy throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee.”

Rose felt the change in her friend, and was happy. Her cheeks were more deeply flushed, and it seemed to her that much of the strength of former days had returned. "Papa," she said, in a low tone, "I believe I am almost well. I am not tired at all. May I ask Ruth to read to me a little now, and will you stay to hear? Please do."

How could such a little request as that from one so dear be refused? It was not, and the father settled back patiently in his chair.

"Woodie, is it too much to ask you to take the Bible from the table and read to me the fourteenth chapter of John?"

Ruth smiled. Words from Him to, whose cross she was now first clinging were more welcome than anything else. Taking up the beautiful book, she opened with difficulty its heavy golden clasps, which evidently had not been much used, and without thinking who were listening, read the old, old chapter whose words are, perhaps, more familiar to most readers than any other in the book. But who ever called them trite? or what Christian has failed to seek them in the time of adversity? "Let not your heart be troubled." "In my Father's house are many mansions." "I

go to prepare a place for you." "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth." "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." All these gracious words, and many others, fell like balm upon the sufferers there.

"'Arise, let us go hence,'" read Ruth at last.

"Yes," whispered Rose to her father, "it is time for me to go back, and maybe your little girl will never come here again."

"Pshaw, Rose!"

"And if I do not, will you come here and remember how happy I have been hearing these things to-day? Will you think that I am in one of the many mansions, and read about the Comforter?"

"What makes you talk so, my child?"

"Because I cannot help it, father; *will* you promise me that, papa?"

"Yes, and anything else if you will not torture me so again. Why, you are getting well, darling."

Rose made no reply, but her father laid her down upon the bed, and went out of the room immediately. Rose and Ruth were left alone.

"You are happier now than when you came here; do I guess the reason?"

"I prayed, Rose, when I sang, and I was answered. The door was opened to me, and Jesus brought me in. How precious were his words to me!"

"I knew it; you couldn't have sung and read so had it been otherwise."

By and by Ruth was dismissed from the sick chamber with the freedom of the house, for Rose had pronounced her too pale and tired to remain. She sought therefore the silence and repose of her room, and wrote a letter to her father, in which, after telling him of Rose, and her own new experiences, she added:

"It seems to me that very few, having resisted so much and so long and been at last brought to submit to the truth, have such great reason for thankfulness as I. It is no work of mine that I should be proud, but all has been done for me, and would have been done long ago, and with less of pain, had it not been for my mad persistence in my own way. To me be the shame, to God the praise.

"I know that as his creature, and also as one for whom Christ died, I have been dear to my heavenly Father, but it seems to me that he has loved me especially for your sake. Because you

gave me to him in infancy he claimed me; because you prayed for me, believing that he would keep his word, he would not let me perish.

"Once my skepticism was so strong—stronger than you thought—that no reasoning was sufficient to demolish it. I expected to be met upon my own ground, and until vanquished there was determined not to yield. But how have I been led away! how has my strong tower been enfeebled by slow attritions! and, lastly, by the heaviest yet the kindest of blows! For all this he has given me strength to be thankful now.

"Once I said 'The religion of Christ is unpalatable, and therefore unnatural to man, since a wise and good Creator would not require his work to do violence to itself.' But now I see that the design of all his laws is to prevent such violence; that, having their origin not in an arbitrary will, but in the necessities of our nature, only through obedience can we arrive at our highest development and happiness.

"I fretted because of pain, not seeing our need of it, and dared to say that the jars and tumults and storms of this world were evidences against the wisdom and love of Him who made it, whom I called unjust, partial, a God to be feared, not

loved. But now it is plain that I, finite, am powerless to understand him, infinite, and that it was necessary that Christ should come into the world to show us the Father.

“While I write I have such a vision of God’s goodness as I did not dream possible before. Our race has been in his thought and clasped in his love from all eternity; and not the race as a whole merely, but each individual has had a central place, has separately occupied his attention, even to the numbering of the hairs of the head. To them that receive him he gives power to become his sons. As he cared for and loved us infinitely then, so he does now, and will for evermore. What need have we to trouble and moan?”





CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NEW LIFE.

THE next day Rose asked Ruth "Can you forgive Hubert now?"

"Yes, Rose."

"Then I die contented, for God will forgive him too, I hope."

Sweetly yet sadly the days in the sick room passed away, the dear sufferer growing thinner and more spiritual, and the hopes of her parents departing, until at the end of two weeks they all watched around her bed through the hours of a gloomy night, and before the dawn came she said, "It is morning," and went away.

They clothed the little rigid form in garments that might have served for a bride; they made for her the narrow bed, satin-lined and strewn with flowers.

Ruth stood over her and wept, not for herself,

not for Rose, but for Lizzie, dead long ago, and for the suffering parents, who had not received the offered peace, were strangers to the Comforter, and whose home and hearts had been robbed of their idol, their song-bird, their only flower.

"Stay with us, Ruth," pleaded both when the last rites had been performed, but that, of course, could not be. She was eager to go home and take up the duties there awaiting her. She had come thence feeling that life was empty, but she was returning knowing it to be full of wealth and work.

At the depôt she found Mr. McMinn, who, being also on the way to Hopeton, offered himself as her escort. He had not ceased to be disagreeable, but recognizing in him one of God's children, and feeling that kindness at least was due him from the daughter of his sister—which title she no longer disclaimed—she cheerfully accepted his polite offer. Naturally the conversation turned upon those subjects then uppermost in her thoughts. He was ready to talk, and poured upon her ears long commonplace dissertations upon moral themes which once she could hardly have borne. Though grace had wrought a work in her heart, it had not blinded her eyes nor given her a relish

for insipidity; yet knowing that his heart was better than his head, that the weakness of the latter was his misfortune, not his fault, and remembering the infinite patience of Him she was to imitate, her own patience sweetly endured.

More than half the homeward way was traversed when their train collided with another. There was a fearful crash, and the car in which they were sitting was thrown upon its side off the track. There was great confusion, many were hurt, some fatally, but Mr. McMinn remained uninjured, and Ruth, with the exception of bruises and a wound in the cheek. There appeared no way of egress. The car was seen to be on fire, and the flames spread rapidly. Seizing an iron from one of the broken seats, Mr. McMinn dashed out the window above, helped Ruth to climb to it and crawl out. Her clothing was a hindrance and it seemed almost an impossibility, but she succeeded at length.

"Are you coming?" she cried, looking back, when the nearness of the flames obliged her to jump for her life.

Mr. Hawthorne, having business at an intervening town not far from the scene of the disaster, had taken that day to transact it, intending

to join his daughter there and accompany her home. So joyful was he over the change indicated in her letters that he felt in haste to see the illumination of the new love in her face and to hear those happy words from her own lips. When the telegraph brought the terrible news he said within his sinking heart, "Gone, but saved!"

In the first train he hurried to the scene, finding Ruth, who had been at work among the sufferers, sitting beside a blackened body, which, in his eagerness to clasp her, he did not notice, and almost tumbled over.

"Thank God, my darling, you are alive!"

"Yes," she replied, "thank God and him," pointing sadly down. "Father, it is Mr. McMinn. He saved my life."

Never was one buried more tenderly or more sincerely wept than Mr. McMinn. Flowers were kept upon his grave through the summer, and his family, who came to Hopeton to live, were cared for, Ruth taking upon herself, so far as lay in her power, the education of his children.

Toward her mother Ruth was all tenderness, and no sacrifice seemed too great to be made for her. Lily felt her influence, and the boys softened their voices and looked up lovingly when

she approached. The invalid Mabel watched trustingly for her coming, and Mary loved her society now. No longer indeed was life empty. If it had been robbed of one happiness, a thousand others flocked together to fill its place, and never before had Ruth so truly lived.

V





CHAPTER XXIX.

BLUE SKY AT LAST.

ABEL'S couch was in the sitting-room, wheeled near the door opening to the piazza. Very softly it must be done in those days. Her mother sat near, while just out of the door, which was open, were Mary and Ruth. The sun had just completed the glory of a clear, warm day by going down in splendor which they had come thither to admire. But chiefly were they enjoying the society of each other, being cheerful even to gayety, with none of the world's conventionalities to restrain them, none of the weights of life to burden them.

Thank God for these moments of rest for body and soul, when cares are unfelt and perplexing questions cease to demand solution; when the present, happy enough for itself, has no need to go to the future for joy; when we lie securely

folded in our Father's love, without thinking where we are, and worship him unconsciously; when we have few definite thoughts, but words are spontaneous utterances expressive of our state.

Ruth had sung a little song for Mabel, which was scarcely finished when Frank appeared before them. He had not been expected so soon, and from every lip there burst forth a cry of delight. Like the loyal son and brother he was, he first embraced his mother, then stooped lovingly to his sister, kissing her and speaking glad words of affection while her arms encircled his neck. After extending his hand to Mary and complimenting her on her improved health, he turned eagerly to Ruth, and grasping her hand, looked with his old frank admiration into her face, scarred now, but full of expression, and declared himself happy in finding so many to welcome him.

"Mother, I am hungry. Of course you have had your 'tea,' but I think I could eat 'supper.'"

Immediately the glad woman went to make it ready. She had not forgotten what Frank liked.

"You have seen father?" said Mabel.

"Yes, and the dear old man fairly cried for joy, and made me feel guilty for being gone so

long. He has grown old while I have been enjoying myself. I must make amends now."

"Why did he not come home with you?"

"He was needed at the office probably, and who ever knew him to desert his post for his own pleasure?"

Here followed a brisk conversation concerning what had occurred in the two years of absence and the people he had met, in whom they were interested, except one, who was never his friend. Not a word then of art, history and wonders, not a foreign phrase, but a glad use of the mother tongue, a glad getting back into the old, comfortable ways of home.

"Can you talk French now?" asked Mabel, a little mischievously.

"Better than you used to, but I am not one whit more fond of it now than then."

His supper being announced, the young man went to the dining-room, where he was soon eating with a heartiness shocking alike to physiologists and sentimentalists.

While he was thus engaged Ruth wanted to slip away quietly, saying that she was half ashamed to have stayed so long at their family tête-à-tête, but Mabel protested, and Frank, hearing

and guessing, left the table to protest also. It was growing dark, but if his escort would be accepted there was no need of haste. Thus overpowered, she remained to spend one of the pleasantest evenings she had ever known, finding an early, faithful, but long estranged friend, who from that time visited familiarly at her house as he used to do, conversing of things healthier and more real than pseudo-philosophy.

Frank made no delay in taking his place at home, but at once set about relieving his father of care, being in return made an equal partner in the business, to which he brought the added knowledge of books and two years of travel with eyes and ears opened wide, and, what was better, a heart kept pure. He also resumed his place immediately as a worker in the church, was a constant attendant at the prayer-meeting, and adding his not small part to its interest and usefulness. All this and more he did, in accordance with the high covenant made long before, to devote all he had and was to the service of the Redeemer. Nor had he found this service bondage. Love, not an oppressive sense of duty, prompted him, and it was freedom in its best sense.

It was not strange, now that Ruth had made this same covenant and was actuated by the same high purposes, that Frank fell again into the old habit of taking her home—not strange that he tried to win her, nor that he should be successful.

A new house, tasteful and commodious, but not stately, was built on the Hope place close by the old one, and here Frank and Ruth began housekeeping soon after their marriage, while Mabel, with her faithful Mary, continued with her parents.

As for Mabel, her years stole slowly away through oft-repeated hopes of recovery, succeeded by disappointments. Sometimes, looking upon her brother and sister, she sighed for happiness like theirs, and wondered why health and the ability to do were not granted to her as to others. It was hard to say "Thy will be done," but she said it from the depths of the heart, knowing *that* will never to be without its kind purpose, and that all things work together for good to them that love God.

Above her was brooding the blue sky of God's love as above others; had she not still everything to be thankful for? Nothing that friends could

do to add to her happiness was left undone. Her room became a sanctuary where the evil of the world could never come, whence people carried away with them lessons of patient endurance and trust which made them stronger to bear the ills of life and more earnest in the Master's work. Lying upon her bed in apparent passiveness, Mabel was an active laborer, a missionary, not in the way she would have chosen, but in God's way. Her temptations were from within, and when the heart keeps itself pure by prayer these can never be overpowering.

She had long ago received a note from Mr. Brainard thanking her for the kind interest she had taken in Noel, his father believing that she had done for him more than all other friends and teachers, when one day Noel himself dropped down among them, and came immediately to her. Wonderfully changed he seemed, the round boy-face having elongated into that of a man, with whiskers and beard, with little to identify him besides the curls clustering round the forehead. But it was Noel still.

He hoped he was a Christian. He was married, and had gone into business which "would pay ten-fold the amount invested," "could not

fail to be a success." He was a very happy man, whose fortune was made, in his own eyes at least.

Not more than a year thereafter he wrote to Mabel that there had been a crash; he had failed through the mismanagement of his partner. But he had not forgotten what she used to tell him. He had been honest, had wronged no one, and was now ready to pick up and go to work again with much heart, henceforth steering clear of partners. He could trust himself, but trusting others was not so safe.

Mabel shook her head, smiled and said, "The same Noel!"

Mark Hawthorne attained to some of the heights of his early ambition; learned to calculate eclipses, studied deeply into the rocks, knew the secrets of the laboratory, and became acquainted with the structure and habits of the greater part of the vegetable and animal world. He also attained to better prayers when repeated failures had taught him his own insufficiency. Now he had always something to pray for of which he was earnestly desirous, and which he believed would be granted. As his friends had hoped, he chose the vocation of his father, for which his

thorough education and qualities of mind and heart eminently fitted him.

Mr. Hawthorne grew old among his people, remaining their pastor in name when his more active labors had ceased, happy in his declining years to see all his children men and women in Christ.

As for Ruth, though not exempt from trials she never again distrusted the constant care and love of her heavenly Father, having ceased to believe her own way the best. Reliable information reached her that Hubert Allaire and his wife were dragging out wretched lives, showing her still more how much she had to be thankful for in the pure happiness in which her days were spent. Instead of feeling hesitation in publicly consecrating their children to God lest they should thereby thrust upon them involuntary service, she and her husband felt it to be the greatest blessing in their power to bestow, and were earnest that the church should become more effectually a nursery of piety to those little ones whom their Maker had placed therein to be reared for him. Very early they placed their hands in His who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me," trusting him to take charge of

their young lives, leading them safely over the dangerous road until they should reach that city of which he is the light and whose joy consists in serving him.

THE END.